

LINCOLN AND LIQUOR

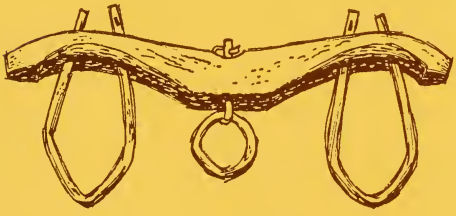
BY

WILLIAM H. TOWNSEND

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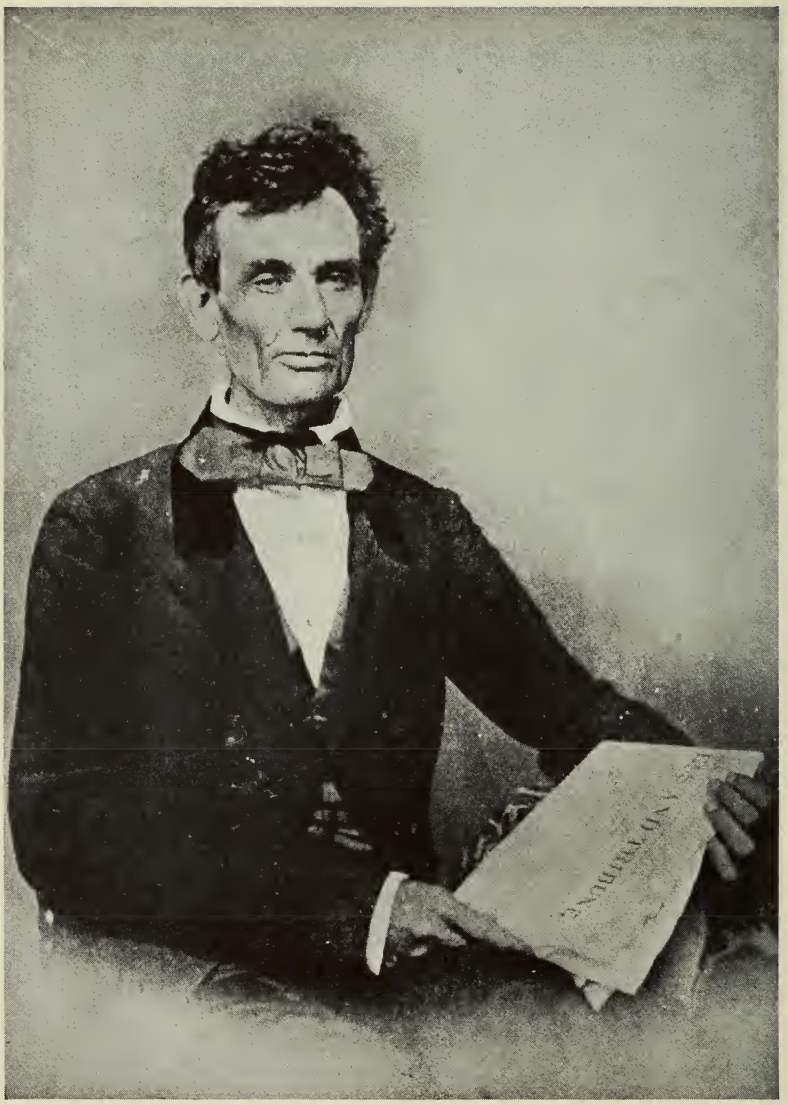
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Photograph of Abraham Lincoln taken for his friend, George Schneider of Chicago, in 1854

LINCOLN AND LIQUOR

By

WILLIAM H. TOWNSEND

Author of

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, DEFENDANT
LINCOLN AND HIS WIFE'S HOME TOWN
LINCOLN, THE LITIGANT

Illustrated

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LINCOLN
ROOM

This book is dedicated
to my law partners, Judge Richard C.
Stoll, Wallace Muir and James Park,
with the warmest appreciation of
the author

1054 RSEARCY

PREFACE

The name of Abraham Lincoln has become a synonym for conservative, farsighted statesmanship, keen sagacity in practical politics, and rugged personal integrity. Vital problems of government which deeply agitate the public mind, especially if moral issues are thought to be involved, hardly ever fail to evoke the query, "What would Lincoln do?" During the past twelve months this question was frequently asked as the various states voted on the Eighteenth Amendment. Members of the House of Representatives discussed it pointedly on the floor of the National Congress.

Now that federal prohibition has been repealed, power to regulate the liquor traffic is again vested in the several states. Wets and drys are already recruiting their ranks for bitter legislative battles, and both sides, mindful of the magic of his name, claim Lincoln.

Would he favor state-wide prohibition, or would he endorse the view of those who contend that temperance is a personal matter which can not be enforced by legislation? Was Lincoln a total abstainer, a prohibitionist, and a lecturer against the evils of strong drink, or was he a user of liquor, a saloonkeeper in his early manhood, and a foe of reform who denounced prohibition as a "species of intemperance within itself"?

Recent research among old newspaper files, musty court records, archives of the Illinois Legislature almost a century old, and the priceless though little known Herndon-Lamon manuscripts in the Huntington Library at San Marino, California, sheds new light upon the highly controversial subject of Lincoln's personal habits, his attitude toward the liquor problem of his own day, and the environment and association which doubtless influenced his views and actions.

In the laborious task of assembling the source material for this book, it has been my fortune to have had not only the efficient aid of various public institutions, but also the intelligent coöperation and kindly interest of many individual friends. Among the former, I desire to thank the Henry E. Huntington Library, Library of Congress, Chicago Historical Society, Illinois State Historical Society, Union Theological Seminary of New York, Garrett Biblical Institution of Evanston, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln Association, New York Public Library, and John Hay Memorial Library of Brown University. As to the latter, I must first express my deep gratitude to Mr. Paul M. Angle, of Springfield, Illinois, and Mr. David C. Mearns, of Washington, D. C., through whose tireless research many important records have been discovered. It is not too much to say that without their generous assistance this study would hardly have been possible.

My thanks and appreciation are also due to Mr. Emanuel Hertz and Miss Ida M. Tarbell, of New York,

Dr. Louis A. Warren, of Ft. Wayne, Indiana; Mr. Carl Sandburg and Mr. Oliver R. Barrett of Chicago, Illinois; Mr. Thomas P. Reep and Mr. Henry E. Pond, of Petersburg, Illinois; Dr. Howard O. Russell, of Westerville, Ohio; Mr. John W. Starr, Jr., of Millersburg, Pennsylvania; Mr. Charles T. White, of Brooklyn, New York; Mr. Clint Clay Tilton, of Danville, Illinois; Dr. Benjamin P. Thomas, of Springfield, Illinois, Mr. Thomas I. Starr, of Detroit, Michigan; Dr. Milton H. Shutes, of Oakland, California; Mr. John T. Vance, of Washington, D. C.; Mr. Charles T. Baker, of Grand View, Indiana; Judge James W. Bollinger, of Davenport, Iowa; Miss Esther C. Cushman, of Providence, Rhode Island; Judge O. M. Mather, of Hodgenville, Kentucky; Mr. Malcolm Bayley, of Louisville, Kentucky, and especially my companions on many historical excursions, Mr. Charles R. Staples, Mr. J. Winston Coleman, Dr. Frank L. McVey, President of the University of Kentucky; Dr. Thomas D. Clark, Dr. John S. Chambers, Dr. Claude W. Trapp, and Major Samuel M. Wilson, of Lexington, Kentucky. Miss Ethel Duncan has rendered most efficient service in typing and preparing the manuscript for publication.

While it is indeed a pleasure to acknowledge the help that has come to me from so many sources, the responsibility for the use of all material, the sifting and weighing of evidence, and the conclusions expressed in these pages must be mine alone. It is quite possible that some

of those to whom I am indebted may not entirely agree with everything I have said, and I have a very high respect for the sincerity of their opinions.

The writing of history in certain aspects is not unlike the working of a jig-saw puzzle. One must take the pieces as he finds them. He is not at liberty to change their size or shape, and the picture is not complete until each piece has been put in its own proper place. When one has made a faithful effort to do this, without bias or any attempt to support preconceived theory, he should be able to abide the result with at least a fair degree of equanimity.

William H. Townsend

September 1st, 1934.
28 Mentelle Park,
Lexington, Kentucky.

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CHAPTER I

KENTUCKY CHILDHOOD

On a raw, sleety January evening, two handsome young men, elegantly attired in black satin smallclothes with knee buckles of artistic design, ruffled shirts, silk stockings and gay-colored brocaded waistcoats, sat at a cardtable before a crackling fire of hickory wood in an upstairs room of McLean's Tavern at Bardstown, Kentucky. One was John Rowan, lawyer, later jurist, Congressman and United States Senator. The other was Dr. James Chambers, son-in-law of Judge Benjamin Sebastian, of the Kentucky Court of Appeals, the most promising young physician in the state.

They had just come up from the tap-room, where Rowan had ordered mugs to be filled with a potent brew, and, turning to those present, had hospitably "asked help to drink it." The "gallon of strong beer" which he and his friend Chambers had drunk before arriving at the Tavern had given them a "zest for more."

The game of "vigutun" which they were playing had not progressed far, however, before Rowan and the Doctor became involved in a heated argument "as to which understood some of the dead languages the best."

Rowan, with bibulous gravity, declared that the Doctor was not competent to dispute with him on such

subjects. Chambers emphatically retorted that he was vastly Rowan's superior in classical scholarship.

"I'll be damned if you are," replied Rowan.

"I'll be damned if I'm not," exclaimed Chambers.

"You are a damned liar," shouted Rowan.

According to an observer: "Each asserted his superiority with warmth and acrimony, both being intoxicated. Mr. Rowan appeared more so, for when blows ensued, Mr. Rowan struck the wall of the chimney as often, or perhaps oftener, than he struck the Doctor."

Through the intervention of friends, the belligerent linguists were quickly separated, but next day Chambers challenged Rowan to a duel. Again friends attempted to "accommodate" the difficulty, but without avail, and, shortly after dawn on the morning of February 3rd, 1801, as a dense fog was lifting along the Beech Fork near Jacob Yoder's plantation, the two masters of the dead languages rode out of the woods, dismounted, removed their greatcoats, wheeled and fired at ten paces, and Dr. Chambers fell mortally wounded with a pistol ball in his body under the left arm.[1]

The Kentucky of Abraham Lincoln's childhood was a brawling, whisky drinking, horse racing, card playing region that amazed early travelers to the western coun-

[1] This incident occurred only a few miles from Abraham Lincoln's birthplace. For accounts by seconds and eye witnesses see "The Palladium," a newspaper published at Frankfort, Kentucky, March 10, May 12, 1801. George M. Bibb, later United States Senator and Secretary of the Treasury under Tyler, was Rowan's second.

try. "They are nearly all natives of Virginia," observed the Frenchman, M. Michaux. "With them a passion for gaming and spiritous liquors is carried to excess, which frequently terminates in quarrels degrading to human nature. If a traveler happens to pass by, his horse is appreciated, if he stops, he is presented with a glass of whisky."[2]

In the Bluegrass region, the center of culture in the western country, encounters between gentlemen were usually attended by the most punctilious observance of the "code," but the backwoodsmen, drunk or sober, scorned such pompous formalities.

When Timothy Flint visited Kentucky in 1818, he noted in his Journal: "Fights are characterized by the most savage ferocity, goughing, or putting out the antagonist's eyes by thrusting the thumbs in the sockets, is a part of the modus operandi. Kicking and biting are also ordinary means used in combat. I have seen several fingers that have been mutilated, also several noses and ears which have been bitten off by this canine mode of fighting."[3]

And Flint's horrified fellow traveler, F. Cuming, wrote back to London: "They fight for the most trifling provocations, or even sometimes without any, but merely to try each other's prowess, which they are fond of vaunting of. Their hands, teeth, knees, head and feet are their weapons, not only boxing with their fists, but

[2] Michaux, 194.
[3] Flint in Thwaites, IX, 138.

also tearing, kicking, scratching, biting, goughing each other's eyes out by a dexterous use of a thumb and finger, and doing their utmost to kill each other, even when rolling over one another on the ground."[4]

Dennis Hanks relates such an incident concerning Abraham Lincoln's father, which occurred "at a gathering in Hardinsburg, Ky." It seems, according to Hanks, that a certain local citizen "was reputed and cracked up as the best man in Breckinridge County." Thomas Lincoln, however, who "though not a fleshy man," was "knit so compact that it was difficult to find or feel a rib in his body," had friends and neighbors from the "Barrens" of Hardin County who disputed the claims of the champion and his supporters.

"It was agreed to and they both consented to a fair fight," says Hanks. "They soon stript and went at it, and Thomas Lincoln whipped him in less than two minutes without getting a scratch." And this, too, in spite of the fact that Lincoln was always "good humored, sociable and never appeared to be offended."[5]

But not all public gatherings in those early glamorous years of the nineteenth century were marred by truculence or tragedy. Frequently at race meetings, shooting matches, militia musters, barbecues and other pioneer festivities, good liquor and good humor were present in great abundance, memories of hilarious

[4] Cuming's "Tour to the West," Thwaites, IV, 137.

[5] Hanks' Chicago statement, June 8, 1865. "No one else ever tried his manhood in a personal combat." Hanks' second Chicago statement. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

political banquets—Kentucky River catfish, mutton chops, wild turkey, venison, hickory-smoked ham, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pies, eloquent speeches; claret, brandy and mellow whisky—were fondly cherished long after the snow of many winters had cooled the blood and bleached the hair of the merry participants.

One of these never-to-be-forgotten occasions was in the autumn of 1809, when the Legislature chose Henry Clay, hardly thirty-three years of age, to represent Kentucky in the Senate of the United States.

That evening the young statesman was tendered a dinner at Frankfort, and, many years later, one who was present recalled that "Gallant Harry of the West," after "the bottle had circulated until a late hour, announced his intention of finishing off the entertainment by a grand Terpsichorean performance on the table, which he accordingly did, executing a *pas seul* from head to foot of the dining table, sixty feet in length, amidst the loud applause of his companions and to a crashing accompaniment of shivered glass and china, for which expensive music he next morning paid, without demur, a bill of $120.00."[6]

The widespread use of alcoholic liquors in Kentucky made the manufacture of ardent spirits one of the earliest and most important industries in the state.[7]

[6] Little, 38.

[7] A traveler who visited in Lexington in 1809 noted "two brew houses" that "make as good beer as can be got in the United States," and seven distilleries. Cuming, 164.

"Bourbon" whisky, a delicately proportioned mash of Indian corn, rye and malt, mixed with pure sparkling limestone water, carefully cooked over a slow burning fire, and distilled through heavy copper "worms" into oaken barrels, charred on the inside, and then ricked high in well ventilated warehouses to be aged by the soft, warm, sweet-scented winds of a dozen languorous summers, was a delicious, exhilarating beverage fit to tickle the palate of a king.

Apple and peach brandies were also in large demand. The fruit, when dead ripe, was thrown into large wooden troughs and pounded with heavy pestles until reduced to pulp. Large powerful screw presses then squeezed the juice into vats of blue ash, where, after fermenting from six to twelve hours, according to the weather, it was ready for distillation.

With liquor drinking so generally prevalent among all classes of pioneer society, one would not expect to find easy-going, lethargic Thomas Lincoln a tee-totaler.[8]

Occasionally he worked at a still house, and one adjoined the birthplace of his famous son, but he used liquor very moderately, and, for his day, was counted a temperate man.[9] The time-stained store ledgers of Bleakley & Montgomery, at Elizabethtown, Kentucky, contain occasional items, such as, "Thomas Lincoln—

[8] "Thomas Lincoln was no drunkard, neither was he a total abstainer." Barton, I, 112.

[9] "Thomas Lincoln was temperate in his habits, never was intoxicated in his life." Hanks' Chicago Statement, June 8, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.



Thomas Lincoln's still-house near Lexington

one pint of whiskey—21c," but they are few and far between when compared to similar entries for other customers.

So much, however, can not be said for the uncle of Abraham's father, who was also named Thomas. This prosperous kinsman, frequently mentioned by Lincoln in his correspondence of later years, owned a fertile farm, cultivated by his slaves, up in the Bluegrass region, where, according to his own description, he also "operated a very good & well fixed distillery" on South Elkhorn Creek, near Lexington.

In 1810, his wife, Elizabeth, sued him for the recovery of certain property under a separation agreement which recited that "the said Elizabeth hath come to a final determination to reside with her husband no longer." Her bill of complaint alleged that "the said Thomas hath been very abusive to his said wife, & has twice kicked her with his feet & once thrown a chair at her, and gives her very repeatedly the most abusive language."[10]

The response that Thomas filed is in contrite but somewhat guarded terms. It alleges that "the said Lincoln with truth can say that whatever of his conduct towards her that may have savoured of either injustice or cruelty, has proceeded either from a deranged mind or casual intemperance & intoxication, and while he with the deepest remorse laments & acknowledges these

[10] Thomas Lincoln v. John O'Nan, Elizabeth Lincoln, et al, March 31, 1810, file 215, Fayette Circuit Court.

errors of his own life, it has been the misfortune of his wife to have her errors also." In further defence, he states that on one occasion his wife "actually approached to strike him with a chair & was about to strike him when he repelled the blow by striking her."[11]

When the case came to trial on December 13, 1810, one of Mrs. Lincoln's witnesses, Peter Warfield, admitted that she was "in the habit of frequent intoxication" and that he had "frequently seen her in that state," but expressed the opinion that it was "generally believed in the neighborhood that Mrs. Lincoln's intemperance proceeded from the bad conduct of her husband."

Evidently the infuriated Thomas, after court adjourned, laid violent hands upon the truthful Peter, because Warfield next morning filed a suit against Lincoln for assault and battery, stating that on the previous day "Thomas Lincoln did with feet and fists commit an assault upon the said plaintiff & him, the said Pltff, then & there did beat, wound & evilly treat so that his life was despaired of greatly."[12]

In after years, when Abraham Lincoln lounged about the courthouse on visits to his wife's home town, and, as he wrote Jesse Lincoln, "heard the older people speak of Uncle Thomas and his family," and perhaps read the dust laden records in the office of the Circuit Clerk, it must have been apparent to him that mutual indulgence

[11] Thomas Lincoln v. John O'Nan, Elizabeth Lincoln, et al, March 31, 1810, file 227, Fayette Circuit Court.

[12] Peter Warfield v. Thomas Lincoln, Dec. 14, 1810, file 227, Fayette Circuit Court.

to excess in the mellow juice of Kentucky corn had been a vital factor in the marital unhappiness of Thomas and Elizabeth Lincoln.[13]

Abraham's Uncle Mordecai, his father's oldest brother, whom he says he "often saw," was also a heavy drinker, and so was his son "Young Mord." The elder Mordecai moved to Hancock County, Illinois, and one stormy December day in 1830, unable to longer breast the blizzard, Uncle Mord dismounted from his horse, lay wearily down in a snowdrift to sleep off his liquor, and never awoke.[14]

Abraham Lincoln had no recollection of his birthplace, the rude cabin by the Sinking Spring on Nolin Creek. When he was two years old his father moved across Muldraugh's Hill to a fertile little farm in the bottom lands of picturesque Knob Creek, and here the Lincolns lived until they moved to Indiana when Abraham was almost eight years old.

This new home was on the old Cumberland Road, the main highway between Louisville and Nashville, and the hustle and bustle along this important thoroughfare afforded contacts with the outside world, in sharp contrast with the isolation of "The Barrens" of Nolin Creek. Caleb Hazel, the closest neighbor of the Lincolns, and Abraham's second school-teacher, kept an "ordi-

[13] Apparently Thomas Lincoln never reformed nor regained his former prosperity. An execution issued against him July 3, 1815, was returned by the sheriff marked "No property found." Execution Book D, 215, Fayette Circuit Court.

[14] Barton's "Lineage of Lincoln," 103-4-14.

nary," and on one occasion was indicted in the Hardin Circuit Court for "retailing spiritous liquors by the small without a license."[15] Peter Atherton, the Knob Creek ferryman, sold whisky also, and in 1814 was arrested for the same offense.[16] Two miles down the road from the Lincoln home, and within sight of the school that Abraham attended, was a distillery which in time became the largest liquor manufacturing plant in the world.[17] Every mill site, cross roads, and other public place had its "ordinary" or "groggery," where peach brandy, apple jack and whisky could be had at low cost.

Liquor drinking was by no means uncommon among the clergy. William Downs, probably the first preacher Abraham ever heard, who baptized Thomas Lincoln in Knob Creek, was "indolent, slovenly, and self-indulgent and, while pastor of the Little Mount Church which the Lincolns attended, was summoned before the congregation to answer a charge of being intoxicated.[18]

David Elkin, another pastor of the same church, who, according to tradition, preached the funeral of Lincoln's mother, is said to have had his reputation "sullied in his later years, perhaps from too free use of strong drink."[19]

Rather frequently, Thomas Lincoln rode to Elizabethtown, and now and then he took his young son with

[15] Warren, 214. [16] Ibid, 168. [17] Ibid.

[18] Spencer, Historian of "Kentucky Baptists," in Warren, 244. "His moral character was so defective that he exercised little influence for good."

[19] Spencer, in Warren, 246. Dennis Hanks says that Elkin was "an old Ky. friend" of the Lincolns.

him. This was on court days or other public occasions, and here, in particular, the boy had abundant opportunity to observe the boisterous conviviality of which the pioneers were so fond.[20]

Doors of the "ordinary" and "groggery" stood wide open and all were heavily patronized. Indeed, an enterprising physician of the village, on the days of militia musters, always had two large buckets of "sweetened whiskey" in front of his office as the backwoods soldiery marched by, and "let the whole company swig to their hearts' content."[21]

It is certain that Abraham Lincoln, during his childhood, whether he rode to mill or played about the ferry, or went to school, or attended church, or visited the county seat, was brought into intimate contact with liquor, and with those who drank it regularly and, frequently to excess.

Moreover, in the business transactions of the neighborhood, Lincoln saw liquor used as one of the chief mediums of exchange. Even at Lexington, the "Athens of the West," church subscriptions were acceptable in "good merchantable whiskey." With no market outlet for his surplus corn, the pioneer often found it safer to convert his crop into whisky than to fatten the jowls of

[20] Elizabethtown was quite a gay place in the backwoods country. At one of the terms of court the defendant moved for a new trial on the grounds that the jury, on retiring and before making a verdict, "did eat, drink, fiddle and dance," and that "divers persons, not of the jury, were admitted and joined with the jury in drinking, revelling and carousing." Haycraft, 54.

[21] Ibid, 153.

half wild porkers which ran at large through the dark, tangled forest.

It is, therefore, not surprising that when Thomas Lincoln left Kentucky to stake out a claim in the wilderness of Indiana, near the close of the year 1816, the rude raft that he launched in the swift, foaming waters of Rolling Fork carried ten barrels of distilled spirits.[22]

[22] Lincoln's raft carried "his whiskey, farming utensils, a chest of cabinet and carpenter's tools" and some household goods. Enroute the raft capsized, but Lincoln "succeeded in saving most of his whiskey, a few tools, and a few other goods." Hanks' second Chicago statement. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

CHAPTER II

INDIANA YOUTH

SIXTEEN miles from the Ohio River, on a slight elevation in the dense, sombre woods, Thomas Lincoln cleared away the thick undergrowth of grapevines, sumac and dogwood bushes, and erected a rude, cheerless shelter of poles and brush, open on one side, which Dennis Hanks called "that Darn Little half-faced camp."[1]

On this isolated knoll, amidst an environment which undoubtedly left its imprint upon him, Abraham Lincoln lived until he was twenty-one years of age.

Social life in southern Indiana at this period was typical of all backwoods settlements. Cabins, though far apart, were overcrowded with large families; few of the inhabitants could read or write; amusements were rough and boisterous; alcoholic beverages potent and plentiful. The most popular form of entertainment was the "frolic." A traveler wrote, "They seldom do anything without having one. Thus they have husking, reaping, log rolling frolics, etc. Among the females, they have picking, sewing and quilting frolics."[2]

These occasions brought the entire neighborhood together, and were invariably attended by much feasting

[1] Hanks to Herndon, March 12, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS.
[2] Woods in Thwaites, X, 337.

and drinking. The men took their whisky straight, while the women sweetened it to a toddy or drank it in the form of a stiff eggnog.[3]

In the evenings by the weird flickering light of burning log heaps, whilst liquor circulated freely in earthen jugs, passed around by small boys, the buxom frontier belles, in short-waisted dresses of linsey woolsey, and their stalwart beaux, in jeans or buckskins, "danced the livelong night barefooted on puncheon floors."[4]

Even at religious services, liquor seems to have had a proper place. Before the log church on Pigeon Creek was built, the little congregation to which Lincoln's family belonged met the preacher at a neighbor's cabin on Sunday morning, where there was usually a bottle of whisky, a pitcher of water, sugar and glasses, and a basket of apples or turnips, or sometimes a cake or batch of fried apple pies. When the refreshments had been consumed, the shepherd of the flock took the floor, threw off his coat, opened his shirt collar, read his text, and then "preached and pounded" until the sweat produced by his exertions and the exhilarating effects of the toddy rolled down his flushed jowls in great drops.[5]

[3] Woods in Thwaites, X, 337. "Brandy, rum and wine can be purchased and whiskey is in great plenty; and too much of it is drank by many."

"Excessive drinking seems the all-prevading, easily besetting sin of this wild hunting country." Faux in Thwaites, II, 212.

[4] Lamon, 53. Woods says that at a public sale the auctioneer "held a bottle of whiskey in his hand and frequently offered a dram to the next bidder. As I made some biddings, I was several times entitled to a sip out of the bottle, and though I much dislike the taste of whiskey, I took a sip for the novelty of the thing." Woods in Thwaites, X, 347.

[5] Herndon, I, 64.

The services were concluded by singing such hymns as, using the grotesque spelling of Dennis Hanks, "O when shall I see jesus and Rain with him aBove" and "how teageous and tasteless the hours when jesus No Longer I see." But one of the worshipers remembered that at "old Mr. Linkern's house" the Sunday morning "treat" was only "a plate of potatoes washed and pared very nicely. They took off a potato and ate them like apples."[6]

The following extract from one of the old minute books shows how the Pigeon Creek Church was supported:[7]

"We the undersigned do asign our names to pay the sevrial somes annexed to our names in produce this fall to be delivered betwixt the first and 20th of December, the produce is as follows corn wheat whiskey pork Linnen wool or any other article or material to do the work with. the produce will Be Dilevered at the meting hoas in good marchanable produce.

"William Barker ere."

Among the names of the "undersigned" appears "Thomas Lincoln in corn manufactured pounds 24."

According to his schoolmate, Nat Grigsby, Abraham Lincoln, at seventeen years of age, was six feet two inches tall, "stout—withey—wirey," and weighed around 160 pounds. "Like the balance of us," says Grigsby, "he wore low shoes, short socks, wool being scarce—between the shoe and sock and his britches,

[6] Lamon, 42.

[7] Records of Pigeon Creek Church at Rockport, Ind; see also Tarbell's "In The Footsteps of the Lincoln," p. 143.

made of buckskin, there was bare and naked six or more inches of Abe Lincoln's shin bone. He always came to school thus—good humoredly and laughing."[8]

Whisky was sold at the cross roads, which later became Gentryville, and young Lincoln and his stepbrother, John D. Johnston, Dennis Hanks and Nat Grigsby loafed a good deal around Gentry's store, where Abe was extremely fond of telling his droll stories. "Sometimes we spent a little time at Grog," Hanks naïvely recalled in 1865.[9] And Grigsby says: "Abe drank his dram, as well as all others did, preachers and christians included," but he stresses the fact that "Lincoln was a temperate drinker."[10]

William Wood, a Kentuckian, and a thrifty early settler of Indiana, was a near neighbor of the Lincolns, and a trusted friend and adviser of Abraham's youth. According to Wood, "Abe once drank as all people did here at that time."[11]

Wood was a temperance man, and took a paper devoted to that cause which Lincoln frequently read with much interest. "One day," relates Wood, "Abe wrote a piece on temperance and brought it to my house. I read it carefully over and over again, and thought the piece

[8] Grigsby's statement, Sept. 12, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS. One of the girls who went to school with Lincoln adds that he wore a "linsey woolsey shirt and a cap made from the skin of a squirrel or coon." Kate Gentry in Herndon, I, 38.

[9] Lamon, 56.

[10] Grigsby's Statement, Sept. 12, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[11] Wood's Statement, Sept. 15, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

excelled in sound sense anything my paper contained." He was so impressed with the article that he showed it to Aaron Farmer, a Baptist preacher, who sent it to a newspaper in Ohio, where it was published.[12]

Doubtless, Lincoln's indulgence in alcoholic beverages during the Indiana years was extremely casual. Indeed his stepmother did not know that he drank at all, or else she had forgotten the rare instances when, years later, she said to Herndon, "He never drank whisky or other strong drink—was temperate in all things—too much so, I thought sometimes."[13]

But the tall, loose-jointed youth, in coonskin cap and skimpy buckskin breeches, found the evenings at Gentry's store none the less entertaining because of the presence of ribald associates. And when the hour grew late and the storekeeper finally dismissed the loungers by snuffing his candles, and the boys of the neighborhood started home, Abe's voice, if not the most melodious, was certainly one of the loudest in singing, as Dennis Hanks wrote, "the turpen (turbaned) turk that Scorns the world and struts aBout with his whiskers Curled for No other man But himself to see" and "Hail Collumbia Happy land if you ain't Drunk I'll be damned."

[12] Wood says that this was in 1827 or 1828. Unfortunately, no copy of this article has ever been discovered.

[13] Sally Bush Lincoln to Herndon, Sept. 8, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS. On the occasion of this interview, she also said of Lincoln: "He was the best boy I ever saw. I had a son, John, who was raised with Abe. Both were good boys—but I must say, both now being dead, that Abe was the best boy I ever saw or ever expect to see."

Dennis further recalled that "Abe youst to try to sing pore old Ned But he Never could sing Much."[14]

Lincoln, however, even in those early days of boisterous fun-making, was quick to lend succor to those in distress. Late one winter evening, as he and several others were trudging homeward from Gentry's store, they came upon an old man lying on his face in a mud hole by the side of the road, helplessly drunk. Rolling him over and seeing that he could not be aroused, the rest of the party proceeded on their way. But Lincoln gathered the unconscious figure in his sinewy arms, threw the half-frozen burden over his shoulder, and, wholly without assistance from his merry companions, carried the old man to a cabin more than a mile away, where "he built a fire, and warmed, rubbed and nursed him through the entire night." The old man gratefully gave Lincoln the credit for having saved his life. "It was mighty clever in Abe," he often told his friends, "to tote me to a warm fire that cold night."[15]

"Lincoln was kindly disposed toward everybody and everything," says Nat Grigsby. "He scarcely ever quarreled." In fact, the only physical encounter of his boyhood days which has been recorded was with Nat's older brother, William Grigsby. It seems that Grigsby and John D. Johnston had a "terrific fight" near Gentry-

[14] Lamon, 59. "Other little songs I won't say anything about," wrote the modest Dennis. "They would not look well in print, but I could give them."

[15] Lamon, 168.

ville, which was attended by all of the countryside for miles around. It was one of those fierce "fist and skull" affairs—kicking, biting, gouging—that so astonished and shocked the early journalists.

After they had fought for some time, Johnston, who had taken a severe mauling at the hands of his larger adversary, suddenly went down with Grigsby on top of him, and the excited spectators closed in upon the struggling youths, cheering and swearing. At this point, Lincoln burst through the crowd, his long muscular arms flying like flails, shouting that "Bill Boland (one of the Grigsby sympathizers) showed foul play." Seizing Grigsby by the heels, he tossed him into the bushes, jerked his step brother to his feet, and, swinging a whisky bottle over his head, "swore he was the big buck of the lick."

"If any one doubts it," he shouted, "he has only to come on and whet his horns!"

This challenge was immediately followed by a general engagement between the two factions, from which the Lincoln crowd soon emerged completely victorious.[16]

Though doubtless of great concern to the participants at the time, this episode evidently left no permanent animosity on either side. In the fall of 1844, Lincoln closed his Indiana campaign for Henry Clay, Whig candidate for President, at Gentryville. It was his

[16] Lamon, 65; Herndon I, 46-47; Grigsby to Herndon, Oct. 25, 1865; Herndon-Lamon MSS.

first return to the home of his boyhood. In the midst of his speech, Nat Grigsby entered the room, and Lincoln recognized him instantly. "There's Nat," he exclaimed, and "without the slightest regard for the proprieties of the occasion," he "scrambled" down from the platform and pushed eagerly through the crowd until he reached his old schoolmate and clasped him by the hand. Then, as though no interruption had occurred, he returned to the rostrum and finished his speech. That night, Grigsby and Lincoln slept together at the home of the village store-keeper, where the Presidential elector from Illinois "commenced telling stories and talked over old times" until long past midnight.[17]

Reuben Grigsby, father of William and Nat, who lived only a short distance from the Lincolns, was one of the thriftiest citizens of the community. He bought and sold large quantities of farm produce, and many bushels of his corn went into hog fat and whisky. Thomas Lincoln made his lard casks, built his still house, and "coopered" the vats and the oaken barrels that held the potent fluid in sturdy embrace through the ageing period.[18]

In 1826, Abraham's only sister, Sarah, married Aaron Grigsby, one of Reuben's numerous sons. Two years later, when she was being attended in childbirth

[17] Lamon, 275.

[18] Charles T. Baker, Grandview, Indiana, to the author, Nov. 10, 1933. Flint refers to land owners in Indiana who rented ground on shares and operated still houses to use the surplus corn. He observes that in 1820 corn sold for "25 cts" per bushel, but "when converted into spirits it yields him at the rate of a dollar per bushel." Flint in Thwaites, IX, 293.

by a local midwife, probably Mrs. Josiah Crawford, a baffling situation arose which required the immediate services of a physician. The nearest doctor lived about two miles away, but when he arrived he was so drunk that he had to be put to bed. Sarah's father-in-law then jumped on his horse and galloped off in a pouring rain to summon Dr. William Davis from Warwick County, but on the return trip the rising waters of Little Pigeon Creek made it impossible to cross at the usual ford, and when Dr. Davis finally arrived at the Grigsby residence, Sarah and her baby were dead.[19]

In the fall and winter of 1826, Lincoln worked on a ferryboat at the mouth of Anderson's Creek, where it empties into the Ohio River. The following year, he and John D. Johnston went to Louisville and worked for a while on the Louisville and Portland Canal, where they were paid off in silver dollars. The next year, Allan Gentry, son of the store-keeper, took a flat boat loaded with meat and other produce down the river to New Orleans. Lincoln went along as a "bow hand" to work the "front oars," for which he received $8.00 a month and board. One night as the boat was tied up at the plantation of Madam Bushane, six miles below Baton Rouge, Lincoln and Gentry, asleep in the stern, were awakened by a band of plundering negroes, armed with hickory clubs. But the stalwart young giant, who would some day strike the fetters from the feet of four million

[19] Shutes, 59. Charles T. Baker to author, Nov. 3, 1933. Mr. Baker is an authority upon the doctors of the Lincoln family in Indiana.

blacks, furiously defended himself, his companion and his cargo, with mighty strokes of a huge bludgeon that knocked some of the marauders into the river and routed the others, leaving the deck slippery with blood and wool, and Lincoln with a deep scar that he carried to his grave.[20]

These contacts with the outside world, as he approached manhood, brought Lincoln in touch with types of humanity more varied than he had ever known in the backwoods. The river revealed to him the lowest and most dissipated sort of life. As the traveler, Wood, observed, in writing his experiences in Indiana and in the Ohio Valley, "many of the store-keepers were very obliging, but the boatmen the very reverse; a rough set of men, many given to drinking whisky, fighting and goughing."[21]

In the autumn of 1829, John Dutton employed Lincoln's stepbrother to operate a still house for him, "up at the head of a hollow," four miles southwest of Huntingburg, Indiana, near what is now the Fredonia and Princeton highway. Lincoln wrote the contract between Dutton and Johnston, and here in this little still house he worked among the mash tubs and copper "worms," the last winter he spent in the Hoosier state.[22]

[20] Lamon, 71-72; Romine's Statement in Beveridge, I, 88.

[21] Woods in Thwaites, X, 255.

[22] Hobson, 79-80. Lincoln left the contract which he had written with his friend and neighbor, Henry Brooner.



Site of still-house where Lincoln worked in Indiana

CHAPTER III

NEW SALEM

It was August 1st, 1831, and election day at New Salem, a straggling village of some fifteen log cabins situated upon a high bluff of the Sangamon River, in what is now Menard County, Illinois. The voting place was at the home of John M. Cameron, one of the earliest settlers in the community.

During the morning, the election officers found themselves in need of a clerk. A tall and very slender young stranger, exceedingly awkward in appearance, even among uncouth surroundings, wearing a calico shirt, brogan shoes and pale blue castinet pantaloons, much too short for his long scrawny legs,[1] was loitering about the polls, and one of the officers asked him if he could write. The stranger's deepset gray eyes twinkled:

"I can make a few rabbit tracks," he drawled, with a Kentucky accent that clung to him all his life.[2]

Later in the day, as the voters came in slowly, the new clerk began to relate some of his Indiana yarns, the most amusing of which remained vividly in the memory of a bystander after the elapse of over thirty years.

[1] Statement of James Short, July 7, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS. Short says that at this time Lincoln "appeared to be as tall as he ever became, and slimmer than of later years."

[2] Lincoln at New Salem, 21.

One Sunday morning, so the story went, an itinerant preacher, short and very corpulent, filled the pulpit of the Little Pigeon Baptist church. The day was hot and sultry, and he wore a huge pair of pantaloons made of coarse linen with a flap in front, attached to his shirt without belt or suspenders, the upper garment fastening by a single button at the back of his neck.

After several hymns had been sung, the minister advanced to the front of the rostrum, and, before reading his text, announced in a loud, solemn voice: "I shall represent Christ today." Just at that instant, a little blue lizzard popped out from between the logs, and, unnoticed by the audience, ran up a leg of his baggy breeches. The preacher slapped wildly at his heavy thigh, and, hoping to allay any suspicion that all was not well, repeated in tones even louder than before: "I shall represent Christ today." By this time the intruder, clawing viciously, was climbing his broad, sweaty back, and, throwing caution to the wind, the good man gave a frantic shrug of his thick shoulders that burst his collar button, and both shirt and trousers dropped to the floor.

Then, as the bewildered congregation sat gazing at the naked, disheveled figure, apparently doing a war dance on the pulpit, an "old sister" arose indignantly to her feet, and, as she marched down the aisle and out of the door, shouted shrilly: "If you represent Christ then I am done with the Bible."[3]

[3] Statement of J. R. Herndon, July 2, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

In this manner, Abraham Lincoln introduced himself to the fun-loving citizens of New Salem, and sprang instantly into a popularity that steadily increased as time went on.

His presence in the village was due to the fact that early in the spring he had taken a flat-boat loaded with bacon, corn and hogs to New Orleans for Denton Offutt, a brisk, boastful, venturesome trader, then engaged in extensive business operations up and down the Sangamon River.[4] Offutt, having taken a great liking to his droll, stalwart boat-hand, had purchased a quantity of merchandise in St. Louis and was opening a store at New Salem with Lincoln in charge.

The new establishment was a general country store, including dry goods, and whisky was as much a part of the stock as coffee, tea, sugar, molasses, tobacco and gunpowder.[5]

The best evidence, however, that liquor was not sold by the drink at Offutt's place is that the convivial element did not congregate there, but had its rendezvous across the road at William Clary's "grocery," where the sportive Offutt himself spent much of his time when he happened to be in New Salem.[6]

Lincoln found little in the pioneer life of Illinois that he had not known before. Religion was demonstrative,

[4] James Short to Herndon, July 7, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS. "Offutt was a wild, harum-scarum kind of a man, and I think not much of a business man."

[5] R. B. Rutledge to Herndon. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[6] Lincoln at New Salem, 24.

and the use of ardent spirits widely prevalent. Community intercourse centered largely about the familiar camp meetings, log rollings, house raisings and trading excursions to the village on Saturday afternoons.

But the deviltry of the Clary Grove Boys added a spice and zest to New Salem atmosphere that Gentryville never had. Wild, reckless, warm-hearted, impulsive, this swaggering set of picturesque young rowdies, descendants of Kentuckians who had brought their racing stock and game cocks to the frontier country, were equally ready for fight or frolic.[7] Devoted to rough sports involving feats of physical strength, hostile to strangers whose courage was yet untested, they stood aloof from Lincoln until one sunny afternoon, under the giant oak near Offutt's store, when the tall, sinewy clerk conquered their chief and champion wrestler, Jack Armstrong. Thereafter, as one of them declared: "Abe was king, his word was law." He umpired their cockfights, wrestling matches and foot races, and his decisions were accepted without a murmur.[8]

Strangely enough, Lincoln never drank any liquor at New Salem. The evidence is uncontradicted and con-

[7] Lincoln at New Salem, 27. Uncle Jimmy Short, looking back upon those days through the sombre eyes of old age, refers in harsh terms to the Clary Grove Boys—"Roughs and bullies who were in the habit of winning all of the money of strangers at cards, and then whipping them in the bargain." Short to Herndon, July 8, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[8] Onstott, 73; "He could throw down any man that took hold of him, he could out jump and out box the best of them, he could beat all of them on anecdote, he was the superior of all of them." J. R. Herndon to Herndon; May 28, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

clusive on this point.[9] "I have seen him," says R. B. Rutledge, "frequently take a barrel of whisky by the chimes and lift it up to his face as if to drink out of the bung-hole, but I never saw him taste or drink any kind of spiritous liquor."[10] And yet, though he neither drank nor brawled, Lincoln never rebuked his roistering companions, nor attempted to reform them in any way, except perchance by force of his personal example.

While he was stretched out reading on the counter, his head propped up with bolts of cotton or calico, a drunken fight would frequently start in the village street and Lincoln would run out, "pitch in," grab the aggressor by the "nap of the neck and seat of the britches," and toss him "10 or 12 feet easily." This, an eye witness dryly observes, "usually ended the fuss," and Lincoln calmly returned to his book.[11]

On one occasion, the Clary Grove Boys persuaded an old man by the name of Jordan to allow himself to be rolled down the steep, rocky bluff in a barrel, for a

[9] "Lincoln never drank liquor of any kind." Onstott, 73. Onstott's father was the village cooper.

"He never played cards nor drank nor hunted." Short to Herndon, July 7, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

"I am certain that he never drank any intoxicating liquors." Statement in Herndon, I, 117.

"In all my acquaintance with Mr. Lincoln, I never knew him to take a drink of liquor of any kind." Ross, 99. Ross was the New Salem mail-carrier.

[10] R. B. Rutledge to Herndon. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[11] J. R. Herndon to W. H. Herndon, May 28, 1865; statement James A. Herndon. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

gallon of whisky, but, as Royal A. Clary tersely remarks, "Lincoln stopped it."[12]

In the early thirties, Dr. John Allen, the genial physician of New Salem, organized a Temperance Society, pledged to total abstinence. The new movement, however, was not popular. In fact, it was vigorously opposed by many church members, particularly those of the Hard Shell Baptist persuasion.[13]

Mentor Graham, the schoolmaster who was teaching grammar to Offutt's young clerk, joined the reform society, and the trustees of his church promptly expunged his name from the roll. At the same time, one of the members was expelled for getting drunk. Mystified by this naïvely inconsistent attitude on the part of the church board, another member stood up, drew from his pocket a flask half full of whisky, and, holding it in his hand, inquired: "Brethering, you turned one member out because he did not drink, and another because he got drunk, and now I want to ask you, how much of this 'ere critter does a man have to drink to stay in full fellership in this church?"[14]

Although he belonged to the village debating club, there is no evidence that Lincoln at any time affiliated

[12] Clary's statement. Herndon-Lamon MSS. Clary was a member of Lincoln's company in the Black Hawk War.

[13] Lincoln at New Salem, 109. One of the residents accounts for much of this opposition by saying that most of the church members had barrels of whisky at home. Onstott, 165. Even that most upright citizen of New Salem, Rev. John Cameron, kept a barrel of whisky in his cellar. Tarbell's "In the Footsteps of the Lincolns," 194.

[14] Lincoln at New Salem, 102.

with the Temperance Society, but tradition has it that years later he publicly acknowledged in Allen's presence that the old doctor had greatly influenced his "ideas upon the liquor question."[15]

By the time the ice had broken up on the sluggish Sangamon in the spring of 1832, Denton Offutt had failed in business, left the country, and his clerk was out of a job. On March 9th of that year, Lincoln announced his candidacy for the Legislature, but a few weeks later he enlisted for service in the Black Hawk War, and was elected captain of the New Salem company, with the doughty, faithful Jack Armstrong as his first sergeant.

The men of Lincoln's regiment were all volunteers, rough, rollicking frontiersmen, who sang and shouted, gambled, played pranks, and heartily despised military discipline. One night, a member of Captain Lincoln's company broke into the officers' quarters and stole several buckets of wine and whisky, which he generously distributed among his grateful comrades. Next morning, the captain was chagrined to find that only a few of his men were fit for marching. To make matters worse, Lincoln himself was arrested, held technically responsible by his superiors for the affair, and, as a symbol of his degradation, was made to carry a wooden sword for two days.[16]

In less than three months, the Black Hawk campaign was over, and Lincoln hurried back to Sangamon

[15] Lincoln at New Salem, 111. Claim, however, has been made that Lincoln gave this credit to Rev. Berry.

[16] Herndon, I, 95-6.

County and plunged into his race for the Legislature, although the election was hardly more than a week off. His personal appearance is described by one who saw much of the young candidate at this time: "He wore a mixed jeans coat, claw-hammer style," says A. Y. Ellis, "short in the sleeves and bob-tailed—in fact, it was so short in the tail he could not sit on it, flax and tow-linen pantaloons, a straw hat and pot-metal boots."[17]

There was, of course, an abundance of liquor at all public meetings where the many candidates appeared, and some of the aspirants for the more remunerative offices were able to "charter" entire saloons and groceries for the free accommodation of those whose suffrage they sought. But Lincoln went his cheerful, friendly way, meeting people, shaking hands, spinning yarns, delivering an occasional speech, but neither indulging in nor making use of liquor in any manner.[18]

Losing by a narrow margin in the election, the defeated politician was looking for a job when a tragedy in the Herndon family where he boarded[19] presented an opportunity for another mercantile venture at New Salem. During the summer of 1832, Rowan Herndon and his brother James had opened a store in the village, but James soon sold out to a young drunkard named William F. Berry. Then in the early autumn, Rowan

[17] Lamon, 127.

[18] Ibid, 125; Beveridge, (MS. Ed.) I, 125.

[19] "He came to my house to board soon after his return from the army . . . my family became much attached to him." Rowan Herndon to W. H. Herndon, May 28, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

killed his wife with a shotgun, claiming that the weapon had been discharged as he was taking it from the loft for the purpose of cleaning it.[20] Sentiment, however, was about evenly divided as to whether the shooting was accidental or by design, and Herndon, anxious to leave the community, sold his half of the store to Lincoln.[21]

A few weeks later the new firm bought a small stock from Rutledge and Sinco,[22] and on January 15, 1833, Berry and Lincoln acquired the wreckage of Reuben Radford's grocery after the Clary Grove Boys, in a drunken spree, had smashed up his place.[23]

Of course, the firm of Berry and Lincoln did not prosper. The junior partner spent most of his time with a book, and the senior partner with a bottle, until the following spring when Lincoln sold his interest to Berry.[24]

It has hardly ever been denied that Berry and Lincoln sold liquor in quantities at their store. Certainly the Rutledge-Sinco and Radford goods acquired by the new firm consisted largely of whisky.[25] But a fierce controversy has raged for years as to whether they sold liquor over the counter by the drink.

[20] Lincoln at New Salem, 45.

[21] James A. Herndon to W. H. Herndon, June 25, 1865. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[22] "A remnant of a stock belonging to Rutledge and Sinco." A. B. Rutledge to Herndon. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[23] Lincoln at New Salem, 45-113.

[24] Ibid, 47.

[25] Rutledge and Sino sold whisky over the bar, Henry Sinco having a "grocery" license. Tarbell's "Early Life of Lincoln," 169. Radford also kept a "grocery." Lamon, 136. Lincoln at New Salem, 45.

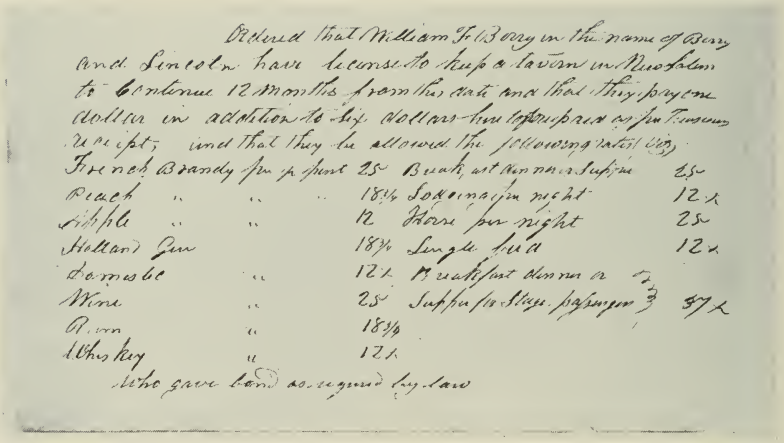
The sale of intoxicating beverages in Illinois at that time was regulated by two Acts relating to "Taverns," which required a tavern license of "any public inn, ale house or dram shop or public house of entertainment," and any "tippling shop commonly called a grocery" that sold or retailed "any rum, brandy, or other spirits, or strong water, by less quantity or measure than one quart" or "any beer, ale or cider, by any quantity less than two gallons, the same liquors being respectively delivered to one person and at one time." The license fee to be paid to the County Commissioners was "any sum not exceeding $12.00 which they may deem reasonable." Bond was required, with surety, in the discretion of the Commissioners, "not exceeding three hundred dollars," for the "good behavior" of the licensee.[26]

On March 6, 1833, the Commissioners of Sangamon County "ordered that William F. Berry, in the name of Berry and Lincoln, have a license to keep a tavern in New Salem," and fixed the prices to be charged for liquor:

French brandy	per ½ pt.	25c
Peach brandy	per ½ pt.	18¾
Apple brandy	per ½ pt.	12
Holland gin	per ½ pt.	18¾
Domestic gin	per ½ pt.	12½
Wine	per ½ pt.	25
Rum	per ½ pt.	18¾
Whiskey	per ½ pt.	12½[27]

[26] The Revised Laws of Illinois (1833 Ed.), 595-597. Quotations from these statutes are from Squire Bowling Green's copy, which Lincoln studied, loaned to the author by Mr. Henry E. Pond, of Petersburg, Illinois.

[27] Photostatic copy of record in author's possession.



Ordered that William Berry in the name of Berry and Lincoln have license to keep a tavern in Newbern to Continue 12 Months from this date and that they pay one dollar in addition to the dollars now by them paid as per Treasurers Receipt and that they be allowed the following rates viz.

French Brandy per gallon	2S	Breakfast dinner or Supper	2S
Peach " " "	18¾	Lodging per night	12½
Apple " "	12	Horse per night	2S
Holland Gin	18¾	Single feed	12½
Domestic "	12½	Breakfast dinner or Supper	
Wine "	2S	for Stage passengers	37½
Rum "	18¾		
Whiskey "	12½		

Who gave bond as required by law

Tavern license to sell liquor issued in the name of Lincoln and Berry

The bond is signed, "Abraham Lincoln, Wm. F. Berry," with Lincoln's old friend, Squire Bowling Green, as surety. Apparently, Berry subscribed his partner's name to the document, since an examination of the original shows that it is not in Lincoln's handwriting.[28]

There is no doubt that Berry operated a tippling shop—a "grocery"—under this license after Lincoln retired from the firm and became the village postmaster on May 7, 1833, but the recollections of old residents of New Salem are not in accord as to whether the store became a "grocery" before Lincoln sold his interest in it.

When William H. Herndon, after Lincoln's death, began interviewing his late law partner's early friends and associates, he wrote to George Spears, who had formerly lived for many years near New Salem, about the kind of store Berry and Lincoln had kept.

"I took my horse this morning," Spears replied, "and went over to the neighborhood of New Salem, among the Potters and Armstrongs, and made all the enquiries I could, but could learn nothing. The old Ladies would begin to count up what had happened in Salem when such a one of their children was born and such a one had a bastard, but it all amounted to nothing. I could arrive at no dates only when those children

[28] The statement has been repeatedly made that Lincoln was opposed to the issuance of this license. The author has been unable to find any authentic support for this statement. On the contrary, considering the intimate relations that existed between Lincoln and Green, it seems more probable that the latter signed the bond as a favor to Lincoln.

were born. Old Mrs. Potter affirms that Lincoln did sell liquor in a grocery. I can not say whether he did or not. At that time I had no idea of his ever being President, therefore I did not notice his course as close as I should if I had."[29]

Nine days later W. McNeely wrote Herndon: "Father asks me to say that he never was in Lincoln's store, but then understood it to be a common grocery—whisky shop—by the drink."[30]

In 1895, when Ida M. Tarbell was writing the "Early Life of Lincoln," her assistant, J. McCan Davis, visited several old persons who had once lived in and around New Salem, in an effort to learn something definite about the Berry and Lincoln establishment.

Daniel Green Burner said: "I clerked in the store through the winter of 1833-34, up to the 1st of March. While I was there they had nothing for sale but liquors. They may have had some groceries before that, but I am certain they had none then. I used to sell whiskey over their counter at six cents a glass and charged it too."[31]

Parthenia Hill said: "Berry and Lincoln did not keep any dry goods. They had a grocery, and I have always understood they sold whiskey."[32]

James McGrady Rutledge said: "There were two rooms, and in the small back room they kept their whiskey. They had pretty much everything except dry

[29] George Spears to Herndon, Nov. 3, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS.
[30] W. McNeely to Herndon, Nov. 12, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS.
[31] Tarbell, 172.
[32] Tarbell, 172.

goods—sugar, coffee, some crockery, a few pairs of shoes (not many), some farming implements, and the like. Whiskey, of course, was a necessary part of their stock."[33]

And John Potter remembered that Berry and Lincoln had "a grocery and they sold whiskey, of course."[34]

In analyzing these statements, it will be seen that of all the persons interviewed by Spears in 1866, thirty-three years after the event, old Mrs. Potter was the only one who recalled that Lincoln had kept a grocery. Spears' report to Herndon aptly illustrates how the elapse of time blurs memory. McNeely did not claim to have any personal knowledge on the subject, but the reputation of the place, as he recalled it, is entitled to some consideration.

Looking back over the long vista of thirty-two years, Mrs. Hill and Potter and Burner declared that Berry and Lincoln's store was a "grocery." The other witness, Rutledge, merely stated that "whiskey was a necessary part of their stock," as indeed it was with nearly all merchants of that day, even where no liquor was sold by the "dram."

However, it must be borne in mind that at the time of the Davis interviews, Mrs. Hill was in her eightieth year, that she did not come to New Salem until she married Samuel Hill on July 28, 1835, two years after

[33] Tarbell, 173-4.
[34] Ibid, 174.

Berry and Lincoln had severed business relations, and that John Potter was eighty-seven years of age, Rutledge eighty-one, and Daniel Burner a year older than Rutledge.[35]

Furthermore, if Burner clerked at the store, as he says, "through the winter of 1833-34," Berry was then the sole proprietor, and had been for months.[36] The fact of Berry's individual ownership for almost a year, and the further fact that Lincoln kept his postoffice all the while at Berry's place[37] and slept, at least part of the time, in the little back room, probably account for the aged Burner's evident confusion, as well as the recollections of Mrs. Hill and Potter.

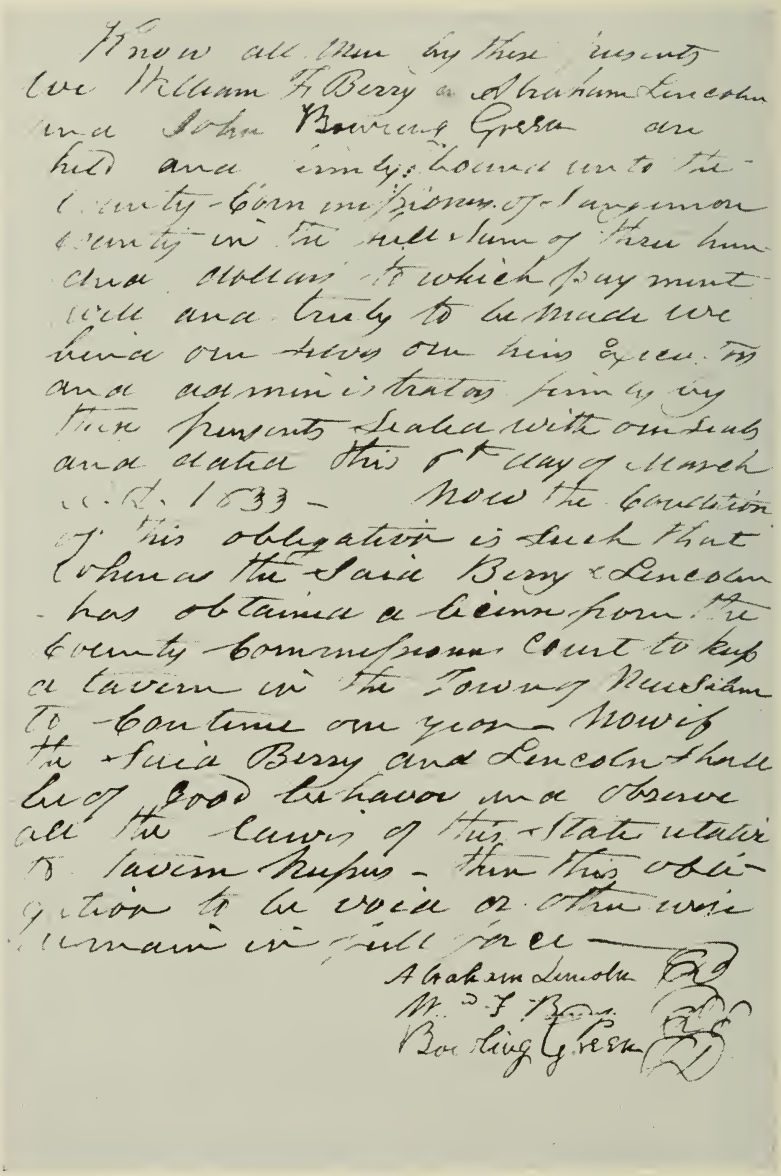
At any rate, this would seem to be a rational explanation, considering the very definite and substantial testimony in opposition to the statements of these witnesses.

About the time Herndon wrote George Spears in 1866, he also consulted James Davis on the same subject, who stated: "Lincoln and Berry broke. Berry subsequently kept a doggery—a whiskey saloon, as I do now or did. Am a Democrat—never agreed in politics with Abe. He was an honest man. Give the devil his dues. He never sold whiskey by the dram in New Salem. I was in town every week for years—know, I think, all

[35] Tarbell, 172.

[36] Lincoln at New Salem, 47, 57, 65. See also mortgage from William F. Berry to E. C. Blankenship, Apr. 29, 1833, Transcript Book A, 273. Menard County Recorder's Office, Petersburg, Illinois.

[37] Lincoln at New Salem, 58.



Know all men by these presents
we William F. Berry & Abraham Lincoln
and John Bowling Green are
held and firmly bound unto the
County Commissioners of said county
in the sum of three hundred
dollars to which payment
well and truly to be made we
bind ourselves our heirs & exrs. firmly by
these presents sealed with our seals
and dated this 6th day of March
A.D. 1833 — Now the condition
of this obligation is such that
whereas the said Berry & Lincoln
has obtained a license from the
County Commissioners Court to keep
a tavern in the Town of Needham
to continue one year — Now if
the said Berry and Lincoln shall
be of good behavior and observe
all the laws of this State relative
to tavern keepers — then this obli-
gation to be void or otherwise
remain in full force —

A Graham Lincoln [Seal]
Wm. F. Berry [Seal]
Bowling Green [Seal]

Bond for liquor license for Lincoln and Berry

about it. I always drank my dram, and drank at Berry's often, ought to know."[38]

And Harvey Ross says: "I am sure no liquor was sold by the drink in his store while Mr. Lincoln had an interest in it. I had occasion to be in the store very often while I was carrying the mail."[39]

On August 21, 1858, Judge Stephen A. Douglas, opening the first joint debate at Ottawa, Illinois, referred to the many points of sympathy between him and Lincoln when they "first got acquainted." Said he: "We were both comparatively boys, and both struggling with poverty in a strange land. I was a school teacher in the town of Winchester, and he a flourishing grocery keeper in the town of New Salem."

In reply to this sly thrust, which Douglas did not repeat during the campaign, Lincoln said: "The judge is woefully at fault about his early friend Lincoln being a grocery keeper. I don't know as it would have been a great sin if I had been; but he is mistaken. Lincoln never kept a grocery any where in the world." Then he added, drolly, "It is true that Lincoln did work the latter part of one winter in a little still house at the head of a hollow,"[40] and the big crowd roared with laughter.

In view of Lincoln's emphatic denial and the positive statements of James Davis and Harvey Ross, the

[38] James Davis' Statement. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

[39] Ross, 99-100.

[40] Lincoln and Douglas Debates, 69. Quotation taken from copy autographed and presented by Lincoln to Captain Job Fletcher, now owned by the author.

weight of the evidence is decidedly against the contention that Lincoln sold liquor over the counter at New Salem, but, whether he did or not, the Berry and Lincoln partnership was his last business venture.

Free from the monotony of drawing molasses and cutting calico, Lincoln found his new duties as postmaster very much to his liking. For years he had been an insatiable reader of newspapers, and now he had regular access to the Louisville Journal, the Missouri Republican, the Cincinnati Gazette, the National Intelligencer, and similar publications from different parts of the country. At the same time, he was able to supplement the meager income of his office with what must have seemed to him highly lucrative employment as assistant to John Calhoun, the County Surveyor.

And so the warm summer afternoons of 1833 slipped swiftly and happily away, as Lincoln read the latest political news to the illiterate loungers who sat on the empty powder kegs around the little postoffice, or loafed along the river bank in the fading twilight with Jack Kelso, the village philosopher and fisherman, while bullfrogs boomed their lusty choruses in the shallow pool below the Cameron-Rutledge mill dam.

Then came a memorable day when the great "tent show" arrived in Springfield. Such a sight had never been seen before in all the frontier country. Clowns, acrobats, beautiful ladies, bareback riders, glittering in silver spangles—a huge Anaconda snake, eighteen feet long! And far up on the top row of rickety slats

under the big canvas sat the New Salem postmaster, attired in the very height of rustic fashion. His coat and pants were of brown linen, his white vest dashed with brocaded flowers. He wore for a necktie a black silk handkerchief with a narrow fringe and tied in a double bow, with a low crowned hat of buckeye splints perched jauntily on the back of his towsled head. Abraham Lincoln, with all the thrilling emotions of a child, was attending his first circus.[41]

[41] Onstott, 50.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEGISLATOR

On a bright, frosty morning in the late autumn of 1834, Abraham Lincoln, one of the new representatives from Sangamon County, clad in a suit of tailor-made clothes, bought with borrowed money, mounted the stagecoach at Springfield on his way to Vandalia, where the Legislature was about to convene. Successful in his second venture into politics, he was to be re-elected for three consecutive terms to the Illinois General Assembly, and never again defeated by vote of the people.

The state capital, located upon the west bluff of the Kaskaskia River in Fayette County, was a typical frontier town of perhaps a hundred houses, mostly frame, with less than a thousand inhabitants. But it was quite a gay social center during the sessions of the Legislature. Many of the members brought along their wives,[1] unmarried sisters and other attractive female relatives, and the winter evenings were filled with brilliant levees, balls and parties.

Liquor, of course, added zest and hilarity to these occasions. A Vandalia grocery announced through the

[1] Here Lincoln met the courtly Orville H. Browning, from Quincy, and his beautiful, cultured wife, and a warm friendship began which lasted until Lincoln's death. Browning to Arnold, Nov. 25, 1872. Copy in possession of author.

press an amazing variety of alcoholic beverages, including champagne, six kinds of brandy in pipes and barrels, Holland and American gin, several barrels of Irish and Monongahela Whisky, six barrels of beer, Burgundy, Madeira, Sherry, claret and two brands of Port wines. Also "bottles assorted, pint and half pint flasks."[2]

When Judge Richard M. Young was elected United States Senator, he gave a banquet to the Legislature, "regardless of party," and one who was present relates that late in the evening, after the company had freely imbibed a vast quantity of "Yellow Seal and corn juice," Stephen A. Douglas and James Shields, to the "intense merriment of the guests," climbed upon the table, as Henry Clay had done years before at Frankfort, "encircled each other's waists, and, to the tune of a rollicking song, pirouetted down the whole length of the table, shouting, singing and kicking dishes, glasses and everything right and left, helter skelter," and that the "supper, wines, liquors and damages" cost the host the neat sum of six hundred dollars.[3]

On another occasion, several members of the Legislature were entertained at a dinner by the citizens of Springfield, one of the toasts being: "Abraham Lincoln —he has fulfilled the expectations of his friends and disappointed the hopes of his enemies." After the twenty-two regular toasts had been drunk, many voluntary

[2] Beveridge (MSS. Ed.), I, 182.
[3] Stevens, 299.

toasts were offered, including Lincoln's: "All our friends—they are too numerous to mention now individually, while there is not one of them who is not too dear to be forgotten or neglected."[4]

Debates in the Legislature frequently became heated and sometimes duels were fought. Lincoln himself almost became involved in an "affair of honor" during the bitter argument over the removal of the capital to Springfield. General Lee D. Ewing, formerly United States Senator, a man of aristocratic appearance, elegant manners, quick temper, and great pugnacity, represented the opposition. Those who favored Springfield chose Lincoln as their spokesman.

In his remarks, which were extremely "cutting and sarcastic," Ewing turned to the Sangamon delegation which sat together in one corner of the House chamber, and sneeringly exclaimed: "Gentlemen, have you no other champion than this coarse and vulgar fellow to bring into the lists against me? Do you suppose that I will condescend to break a lance with your low and obscure colleague?"

When the General had finished, a spectator relates that Lincoln leaped to his feet and launched into a vicious reply that "tore the hide off Ewing." Usher F. Linder, who was in the gallery, observed that Lincoln "retorted upon Ewing with great severity," and adds, "this was the first time that I began to conceive a very

[4] Beveridge (MSS. Ed.), I, 211; Sandburg, I, 199.

high opinion of the talents and personal courage of Abraham Lincoln."[5]

When the House adjourned that afternoon, it was freely predicted that a challenge would pass between the parties, but the counsel of friends prevailed and further difficulty was avoided.

Occasionally, even amidst the convivial atmosphere of the capital, Lincoln had fits of gloom, which were to increase in frequency as the years went by. "You recollect that I mentioned at the outset of this letter that I had been unwell," he wrote to Mary Owens from Vandalia, as the Legislature of 1836 convened. "That is the fact, though I believe I am about well now; but that, with other things I can not account for, have conspired and have gotten my spirits so low that I feel that I would rather be any place in the world but here. I really can not endure the thought of staying here ten weeks."[6]

But the fiddle of Newton Walker, of Fulton County, and the companionship of Archibald Williams of Adams, usually kept Lincoln in good spirits. Williams was over six feet in height, and was, says Linder, "as angular and ungainly in his form as Mr. Lincoln himself." The two legislators were almost inseparable, and sat near each other in the House. One day a friend of Linder's asked him: "Who in the hell are those two ugly men?"[7]

[5] Linder, 62-63.

[6] Lincoln to Mary Owens, Dec. 13, 1836. Works, I, 17. The fact that this was near the beginning of his strange, desultory, courtship of Miss Owens probably accounts for his feelings in this instance.

[7] Linder, 239. Lincoln said of Williams that he "thought him the strongest minded and clearest headed man he ever saw."

During Lincoln's first two terms, the law regulating the sale of liquor in Illinois, which had been on the statute books since 1819,[8] was amended twice. On February 12, 1835, the maximum limit of the license fee was raised from $12.00 to $50.00. And on February 10, 1837, the license was entirely removed from the sale of beer and cider in any quantity. Neither of these amendments seems to have been considered very important, and, since no roll calls were demanded, Lincoln's vote is not a matter of record.

The spirit of the times, however, was changing rapidly. The session of 1838-39 felt strongly the effect of the numerous temperance societies that were springing up all over the country. Petitions poured in expressing deep hostility to the "liquor traffic." Lincoln presented a petition of "631 citizens of Sangamon County, praying the repeal of all laws authorizing the retailing of intoxicating liquors."[9]

Realizing that prohibition at this time was impossible, the foes of liquor confined their efforts toward more stringent regulatory laws. A high license fee, a heavy bond, an increase in the minimum quantity which could be sold without a license, and a provision which later came to be known as "local option," were the chief objectives.

On January 26, 1839, John J. Hardin, a member of the Committee on the Judiciary, introduced such a bill

[8] Revised Laws of Illinois, 1833 Ed., 594-598.
[9] House Journal, Session 1838-9, 319.

and presented the committee's report condemning the existing law.[10] On February 26th, when the bill came up for third reading, an amendment was offered reducing the minimum license fee from $50.00, as provided in the bill, to $25.00. Lincoln and forty-four other members voted against this amendment, and it was rejected.[11] Then the House voted on the bill itself, which failed of passage by a tie vote of thirty-nine to thirty-nine, Lincoln voting against the measure.[12]

On the following day, a similar bill, including a local option provision, which had been approved by the Senate, was received by the House, and was passed, forty-three to thirty-seven, and again Lincoln is recorded as voting in the negative.[13] This Act imposed a license fee of not less than $25.00 nor more than $300.00, instead of the maximum of $50.00 under the old law. The maximum bond was increased from $300.00 to $500.00. The minimum quantity of vinous or spiritous liquors which could be sold without a license was raised from one quart to one gallon. A local option clause provided that if a majority of the legal voters in any county, justice's district, incorporated town or ward in any city, should petition the authorities not to grant license for the sale of liquor, none should issue until a similar majority from the same political subdivision should petition for the granting of the license.[14]

[10] House Journal, Session 1838-9, 287.
[11] Ibid, 527-8.
[12] Ibid. [13] Ibid, 536.
[14] Laws of Illinois, 1838-9, 71-2.

The new liquor law was held as a victory for the temperance forces, but the liberal element was not ready to concede defeat. Hardly had the special session of 1839-40 opened, when, on December 19, 1839, a bill was introduced to repeal it. Upon motion, "the whole matter" was referred to the committee on the Judiciary.[15] On December 26th, that Committee reported a substitute bill, and recommended its passage. This bill reduced the maximum license fee from $300.00 to $150.00. License was only required for the sale of liquor in quantities less than one quart instead of one gallon. The local option clause was omitted.

A representative from Vermilion County moved to amend the Act by inserting a local option provision, such as the existing law contained. This motion was lost by a tie vote, thirty-nine to thirty-nine, Lincoln voting against it.[16] On January 13, 1840, when the bill came up for its third reading, a local option amendment was again offered, but voted down, forty-two to thirty-six, Lincoln still voting in the negative.[17] On January 27th, the bill was passed by a vote of fifty-two to twenty-nine, Lincoln voting in favor of the measure.[18]

Although this Act passed the House by a decisive majority, the temperance forces succeeded in blocking its passage in the Senate, and it failed to become a law.

When the 1840-41 session convened, the temperance leaders immediately assumed the offensive in an effort

[15] House Journal, Session 1839-40, 62.
[16] Ibid, 86. [17] Ibid, 162. [18] Ibid, 262.

further to restrict the sale of liquor. To that end, Attorney General W. Kitchell promptly addressed the Legislature on November 26, 1840:

"The first degrees of sin and crime," declared General Kitchell, "are frequently taken at those licensed and tolerated places of idleness and intoxication called Groceries, Coffee Houses, Exchanges, and all synonymous terms for places of excess and disorder. There it is that our youths are led astray, and their fathers seduced, to their own shame, to the wasting of the most necessary means for the immediate support of them and their families. A father's degradation, a son's disgrace, and the ruin of whole families, may be traced back to these haunts of vice."

In the speaker's opinion, "the greatest injury to society from the sale of spiritous liquors results from the small measure by which they are sold. I would, therefore, recommend," said Kitchell, "that all persons be prohibited from retailing intoxicating liquors in a less quantity than one quart in any situation, or under any circumstances whatsoever."

In this way, "the great evil resulting from congregated masses at tippling shops to the disturbance of public peace and the ruin of its subjects will, it is thought, be to a great degree prevented."[19]

Without delay, the Committee on the Judiciary proposed a new license law which was referred to a select committee. On December 19, 1840, Representa-

[19] House Journal, Session 1840-41, 13.

tive Ormsbee "reported the same back to the House with a substitute for the original bill which fixed the license fee at from $10.00 to $100.00." Representative Ross moved to increase the maximum fee to $25.00. A representative bearing the same name as the Attorney General, probably a relative, then, somewhat heatedly, announced that "as the only object of these laws seemed to be to raise revenue, he should support the amendment. He would also suggest that we should license gambling." To which the hot-tempered Mr. Murphy, of Cook County, replied that "it seemed to be the desire of some that we should legislate the country into morality. He desired to give them an opportunity to effect their purpose."[20]

Murphy, thereupon, moved to strike out all after the enacting clause and insert as follows: "That after the passage of this Act no person shall be licensed to sell vinous or spiritous liquors in this state, and that any person who violates this Act by selling such liquors shall be fined in the sum of one thousand dollars, to be recovered before any court having competent jurisdiction."[21]

For a few moments, the members seemed dazed at the unexpectedness with which the issue of state-wide prohibition had been squarely thrust upon them, but Lincoln was equal to the emergency, and the House Journal records that "Mr. Lincoln moved to lay the

[20] Abstract of House Debate, Sangamo Journal, Dec. 22, 1840.
[21] House Journal, Session 1840-41, 136.

proposed amendment on the table," which was hastily done by an overwhelming vote of seventy-five to eight.[22]

For many years, and particularly after the adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment, the report was widely circulated at various times that Lincoln, on this occasion, the very page of the Journal being often cited, declared that "prohibition will work great injury to the cause of temperance. It is a species of intemperance within itself, for it goes beyond the bounds of reason, in that it attempts to control a man's appetite by legislation, and in making crimes out of things that are not crimes. A prohibitory law strikes a blow at the very principles upon which our government is founded. I have always been laboring to protect the weaker classes from the stronger, and I can never give my consent to such a law as you propose to enact." And then Lincoln is supposed to have dramatically concluded: "Until my tongue is silenced in death, I will continue to fight for the rights of man."[23]

However, neither the House Journal nor the Springfield newspapers which published abstracts of the debates and legislative proceedings for December 19, 1840, show that Lincoln made any remarks whatever in support of his motion, nor is the statement attributed to

[22] House Journal, Session 1840-41, 136. "While acting as their representative, I shall be governed by their will on all subjects upon which I have the means of knowing what their wish is, and upon all others, I shall do what my own judgment teaches me will best advance their interest." Lincoln's "Political Views," June 13, 1836. Works, I, 15.

[23] For a few instances see New York Times, Apr. 11, 1926; Louisville Courier-Journal, Nov. 6, 1930; Louisville Herald-Post Apr. 18, 1932.

him to be found in any of the several editions of his writings and works.

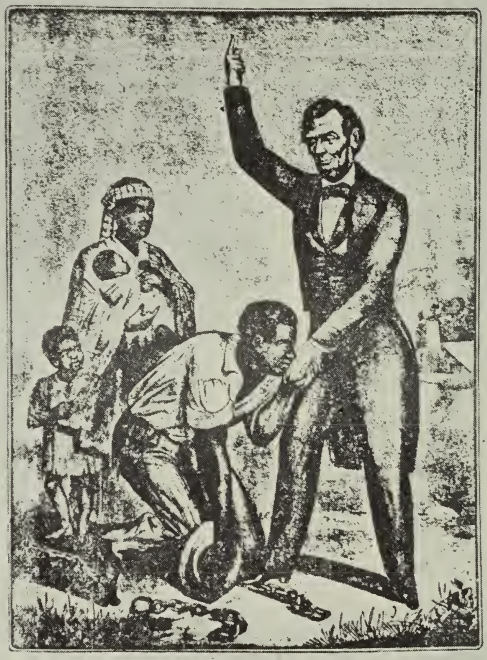
On the contrary, there seems to be satisfactory evidence that this statement was fabricated in Atlanta, forty-seven years after Lincoln is alleged to have made it, for the purpose of influencing negro voters, during a turbulent campaign, to drive out the saloons in Fulton County, Georgia, in the fall of 1887. Near the close of the contest, hand-bills were circulated among the colored population bearing a picture of Abraham Lincoln striking the shackles from a kneeling negro, followed by the spurious statement against prohibition, and a stirring exhortation: "Colored voters, he appeals to you to protect the liberty he has bestowed upon you. Will you go back on his advice. Look to your rights! Read and act! *Vote for the sale!*"[24]

Still, it can not be denied that Lincoln's record in the Illinois House of Representatives shows that he voted consistently with the liberal element on liquor legislation. He voted against a bill offered by the temperance forces when his vote would have passed the measure. He voted against a similar bill that had passed the Senate. He voted twice against local option amendments, once when his vote would have carried the amendment. He voted for an act which would have become a law had not the temperance advocates defeated

[24] The American Issue, July 22, 1922. For full details of this hoax, see The Voice, Jan. 19, 1888.

FOR LIBERTY!

Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation!



Prohibition will work great injury to the cause of temperance. It is a species of intemperance within itself, for it goes beyond the bounds of reason, in that it attempts to control a man's appetite by legislation and in making crimes out of things that are not crimes. A prohibitory law strikes a blow at the very principles on which our Government was founded. I have always been found laboring to protect the weaker classes from the stronger, and I can never give my consent to such a law as you propose to enact. Until my tongue be silenced in death I will continue to fight for the rights of man."

Colored voter, he appeals to you to protect the liberty he has bestowed upon you. Will you go back on his advice

LOOK TO YOUR RIGHTS! READ AND ACT!

VOTE FOR THE SALE!

Spurious hand-bill circulated in Atlanta

it in the Senate, and he voted in favor of his own motion which killed a state-wide prohibition amendment.

However, in spite of Lincoln's apparent attitude toward the enforcement of temperance by law, there can be no doubt, as we shall see, of his firm belief in temperance as a rule of personal deportment.

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CHAPTER V

A WASHINGTONIAN

On April 6, 1840, six liquor addicts met in the rear of a saloon in Baltimore and formed an organization opposed to the use of alcoholic beverages, called "The Washington Society." Urging total abstinence, with a membership consisting largely of reformed drunkards, this movement swept across the country with the fervor and zeal of a crusade, and within three or four years 600,000 bleary-eyed derelicts had signed the pledge.[1]

In December 1841, a Washington Temperance Society was organized in Springfield, and a few days later its membership numbered 350 persons out of a population of less than 2,000. Similar societies quickly sprang into existence at Athens, Salisbury, and other towns in Sangamon County.

Article Two of the constitution adopted by the Springfield Chapter recited that "the sole object" of the Society was "to advance the cause of temperance, and especially direct its efforts to the redemption of our fellowmen who have been degraded by the use of intoxicating liquor."

[1] The founders of The Washingtonians were: W. K. Mitchell, a tailor; J. F. Hoss, a carpenter; David Anderson and George Steers, blacksmiths; James McCurley, a coach-maker, and Archibald Campbell, a silversmith; White, 37. See also Banks, 99-101.

Article Three provided that "any person having signed the Washington Temperance pledge in this city, and who adheres strictly to the same, shall be members of this Society, and if any one shall be so unfortunate as to violate said pledge, his case shall be brought before the Society, whose duty it shall be to use every other means to restore him before he shall be expelled."

The pledge to which the members subscribed was simple, brief and explicit: "The undersigned being desirous of carrying out the principles of Temperance, do pledge our honor that we will abstain from all intoxicating drinks."[2]

The first evidence of Abraham Lincoln's connection with the Washington Society is the eulogy of a deceased member which he delivered on February 11, 1842. In opening his address, Lincoln referred to the "sudden and melancholy death of its much respected member, Benjamin Ferguson."

"Mr. Ferguson," he observed, "was one who became a member of this Society without any prospect of advantage to himself. He was, though not totally abstinent, strictly temperate before; and he espoused the cause solely with the hope and benevolent design of being able, by his efforts and example, to benefit others. Would to God he had been longer spared to the humane work upon which he had so disinterestedly entered."

Lincoln then spoke briefly and appropriately of the sterling character and many virtues of the deceased,

[2] Records in Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

and closed his remarks with the somewhat trite sentiment: "In very truth he was, "the noblest work of God—an honest man."[3]

Eleven days later, on February 22, 1842, following a spectacular parade of the Sangamo Guards, Lincoln delivered a Washington's Birthday oration before the Society, and an assemblage that packed the Second Presbyterian Church. He began his speech by congratulating the friends of temperance upon the rapid strides which the cause had made in recent years. This great success was due to "rational causes" which, upon consideration, were apparent. The warfare hitherto "waged against the demon intemperance" had been ineffective. There was something wrong either with their advocates or the tactics employed. "These champions," said Lincoln, "for the most part have been preachers, lawyers and hired agents"—men between whom and the "mass of mankind" there was a "want of approachability." Motives of self-interest were charged against them —the preacher, it was said, was a fanatic who desired a "union of church and state," the lawyer, in hearing himself speak, gratified his "pride and vanity," the hired agent worked for his salary.

The "new champions," to whom recent "success is greatly, perhaps chiefly, owing," were themselves reformed drunkards. When "a redeemed specimen of long lost humanity" appeals to his former associates,

[3] Angle, 12. This address was published in the Sangamo Journal, Feb. 11, 1842.

"there is a logic and an eloquence in it that few with human feelings can resist." Nobody can doubt his sincerity or question his motives.

Lincoln expressed the opinion that former methods of reform had been injudicious—"to much denunciation against dram sellers and dram drinkers was indulged in," said he. "This, I think, was both impolitic and unjust. It was impolitic because it is not much in the nature of man to be driven to anything; still less to be driven about that which is exclusively his own business, and least of all where such driving is to be submitted to at the expense of pecuniary interest or burning appetite."

As long as they were denounced "in thundering tones of anathema" as the authors of all the vice and misery and crime in the land—classed with "thieves and robbers and murderers . . . . shunned by all the good and virtuous," it was no wonder that they did not readily "join the ranks of their denouncers in a hue and cry against themselves."

"Persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion," said Lincoln, is the best way to influence human conduct. Gain a man's friendship first and then it is not difficult to successfully appeal to his reason. "On the contrary," he observed, "assume to dictate to his judgment, or to command his action, or to mark him as one to be shunned and despised, and he will retreat within himself—all efforts to reform him will be in vain."

The Washingtonians knew that "their real friends and companions" were not "demons nor even the worst

of men." Far from it. "Generally they are kind, generous and charitable, even beyond the example of their more staid and sober neighbors."

The older generation had "found intoxicating liquor recognized by everybody, used by everybody, repudiated by nobody." Physicians prescribed it. Preachers had it on their sideboards. Its manufacture was an honorable means of livelihood; its sale a reputable business.

Even as to those who habitually used liquor to excess, "none failed to think the injury arose from the use of a bad thing, but from the abuse of a very good thing. . . . Their failure was treated as a misfortune, and not as a crime, or even as a disgrace." Was it strange, therefore, "that some should think and act now as all thought and acted twenty years ago?" Was it "just to assail, condemn or despise them for doing so?" The Washingtonians, declared Lincoln, repudiated the inhuman doctrine of the old reformers that consigned the habitual drunkard to utter and eternal damnation. They bear aloft the torch of hope—despair is banished. "While the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return." The most ardent exponents of the new cause were once the chief offenders.

"Whether or not the world would be vastly benefitted by a total and final banishment from it of all intoxicating drinks, it seems to me not now an open question," said Lincoln, emphatically. "Three-fourths of mankind confess the affirmative with their tongues, and I believe all the rest acknowledge it in their hearts."

This being so, everybody should lend a hand in providing "moral support and influence" for those who were struggling to resist the craving for drink. No person, however sober and reputable, should regard himself too good to join what some people called "a reformed drunkards' society."

"In my judgment," said the speaker, "such of us as have never fallen victims have been spared more by the absence of appetite than from any mental or moral superiority over those who have. Indeed, I believe that if we take habitual drunkards as a class, their heads and their hearts will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any other class."

Lincoln then referred to the "political revolution of '76," which demonstrated to the world "the capability of man to govern himself." What of the temperance revolution? What a "noble ally" to the "cause of political freedom . . . in which we shall find a stronger bondage broken, a viler slavery manumitted, a greater tyrant deposed." And this moral triumph accomplished without the costly price paid for our political liberty! No orphans—no widows—no bloodshed! Even the makers and sellers of liquor "will have glided into other occupations so gradually as never to have felt the change."

In conclusion, the speaker expressed the hope that the day would come "when there should be neither a slave nor a drunkard" on the globe, and paid a brief,

glowing tribute to Washington—"the mightiest name of earth."[4]

Such was Lincoln's first temperance address. The Washingtonians were satisfied with it and had it printed. The Sangamo Journal gave it favorable mention.[5] But caustic comment came from other quarters. His criticism of the old reformers and his exhortation to fellowship with the fallen rankled in the breasts of the bigots.

"I was at the door of the church as the people passed out," says Herndon, "and heard them discussing the speech. Many of them were open in the expression of their displeasure. 'It is a shame,' I heard one man say, 'that he should be permitted to abuse us so in the house of the Lord.' "[6]

So far as known, Lincoln made only two references to his Washington's Birthday speech. On the day of its delivery, he wrote his young friend, George E. Pickett, for whom he had obtained an appointment to West Point,[7] and who, years later, was to lead his shattered brigades up Cemetery Hill in the historic charge at Gettysburg: "I have just told the folks here in Springfield, on this 110th anniversary of the birth of him whose name, mightiest in the cause of civil liberty, still mightiest in the cause of moral reformation, we mention

[4] Works, I, 193.

[5] Sangamo Journal, Feb. 25, 1842.

[6] "The whole thing, I repeat, was damaging to Lincoln." Herndon, II, 261-2. This address contributed to Lincoln's defeat that year for the Whig nomination to Congress, when Hardin won. Newton, 19.

[7] "George E. Pickett was appointed to West Point through the political power and friendship of Abraham Lincoln." Pickett, 126.

in solemn awe . . . that the one victory we can ever call complete will be that one which proclaims that there is not one slave or one drunkard on the face of God's green earth. Recruit for this victory."[8]

Several weeks later, he wrote his old roommate, Joshua Speed, at Louisville: "You will see by the last Sangamo Journal that I made a temperance speech on the 22nd of February, which I claim that Fanny and you should read as an act of charity to me, for I can not learn that anybody else has read it, or is likely to. Fortunately, it is not very long, and I shall deem it a sufficient compliance with my request if one of you listens while the other reads it."[9]

For a year or more after Lincoln's address, the Washingtonians remained active in Springfield. Herndon says that, in spite of criticism directed against him, "nothing daunted, Lincoln kept on and labored zealously in the interest of the temperance movement. He spoke often again in Springfield, and also in other places over the country, displaying the same courage and adherence to principle that characterized his every undertaking."[10]

However, by the end of 1842, the Washington movement had perceptibly waned,[11] the hysterical enthusiasm

[8] Lincoln to George E. Pickett, Feb. 22, 1842. Works, I, 191.

[9] Lincoln to Joshua Speed, March 27, 1842. Works, I, 214.

[10] Herndon, II, 261-2.

[11] The movement depended upon moral suasion alone, many of its most zealous supporters opposing all resort to the enactment or enforcement of laws against the traffic." White, 38. Some thought that the "weak spot" in the movement was the lack of religion. Many leaders "would not consent for the meetings to be opened with prayer." Banks, 109-10.

of the great reform had subsided as suddenly as it began, and we hear nothing further of Lincoln's temperance activities until the Sangamon Temperance Union was formed in May 1846. This organization was apparently a central agency for the twenty or more local temperance societies in the county.[12] It had a President, Secretary, and a Board of Visitors, whose duty it was to attend the meetings of the local societies and encourage them in their work.

At a meeting on August 31, 1846, J. B. Watson reported to the Board that Mr. Lincoln had addressed the Springfield Juvenile Society, and that three had signed pledges. On June 28, 1847, it was reported that Lincoln and S. S. Brooks had attended "an interesting meeting" at Langston's, where Lincoln made "an excellent address," but no pledges were signed. Upon advice of J. B. Weber, the minutes of the Board on August 30, 1847, recite that Lincoln and J. Robinson addressed a meeting on South Fork, and that one pledge had been signed.

Of this last temperance gathering, we have the recorded recollections of several persons who were present. It was held at the South Fork school house in Cotton Hill Township. The log structure had just been erected, and, the day being warm, the crowd sat outside on the freshly cut stumps. Cleopos Breckenridge, many

[12] The minute book of this Society was recently discovered by Paul M. Angle, and is now in the archives of the Illinois State Historical Society. It existed from May 1846 to Sept. 1850.

years afterward, remembered that Lincoln "made a very strong appeal for total abstinence. . . . He gave reasons why he was in favor of total abstinence, and why he thought others should become total abstainers."[13]

In the autumn of 1847, Lincoln made an address one evening at a church, while attending court at Tremont. The pastor "made some opening remarks," and, turning to the circuit rider who sat beside him on the rostrum, smilingly said: "I will now give place to the strong man."

Lincoln unfolded his tremendous stature and, as he walked forward, drolly observed: "If my reverend friend had said the long man, he would have hit it."

One of those present relates that "his following remarks were strongly in favor of total abstinence, and he earnestly advised the boys to sign the pledge."[14]

But, in spite of his temperance activities, there is no positive evidence that Lincoln was ever a member of any of the reform societies, although it would seem very probable that he was a Washingtonian. So far as the records show, he did not belong to the Sangamon Union, and certainly he was neither an officer nor a member of the Board of Visitors.

The Sons of Temperance was another anti-liquor society which flourished in Illinois during the early fifties, and James Gourley told Herndon: "I got Lincoln to join the Sons of Temperance about 1854. He joined

[13] Banks, 33-4; Hobson, 54.
[14] Shaw, 13.

and never appeared in it again."[15] But if he ever considered himself a member of this organization, Lincoln did not mention the fact when he addressed one of its delegations at the White House on September 29, 1863.[16] And on September 26, 1854, Judge James S. Ewing heard him say at Bloomington, "I am not a member of any temperance society."[17]

[15] Gourley's statement to Herndon. Herndon-Lamon MSS. "Lincoln was a great temperance man during the time of the Washingtonians."

[16] Works, IX, 144.

[17] James S. Ewing, Feb. 12, 1909, in Phillips, 55.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAINE LAW CAMPAIGN

During the late thirties and through the decade of the forties, temperance reform in Illinois, as we have seen, was largely confined to the exertion of "moral suasion." There was seldom any serious mention of prohibition. But around the turn of the fifties, those who waged war on strong drink began to clamor for the absolute suppression of the liquor traffic by law.

In 1851, the Maine Legislature enacted a measure introduced by Neal Dow, which prohibited the manufacture and sale of intoxicating beverages in that state,[1] and this law immediately became a model for similar legislation adopted in New England.

That same year, the temperance forces in Illinois won a signal victory by securing the passage of an Act known as the "Quart Law," which made it unlawful to sell liquor "by a less quantity than one quart," prohibited its sale "by any quantity whatever to be drunk in any house, tavern, store, grocery, outhouse, shed, or other building," and repealed all license laws.[2] Thus, the iniquitous tippling house which served liquor by the "dram" was abolished.

[1] For text of the Maine Law, see White, 165.
[2] General Laws of Illinois, 17th General Assembly, 18-19.

By 1853 the prohibition agitation had really become acute in Illinois. The Legislature which convened in January was flooded with petitions favoring the passage of a Maine Law. Additional pressure was brought upon the General Assembly by a temperance organization called the Maine Law Alliance, which met in convention at Springfield on January 23rd and continued in session for several days.

On the first day, the delegates were addressed by Dr. James Smith, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. Taking his text from Habakkuk, 11:15: "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that puttest thy bottle to him." Dr. Smith, with great dramatic fervor, drew a vivid picture of the drunkard—"a miserable being with bloated face and shabby appearance, frequenting the lowest haunts of vice . . . forever under the influence of strong drink, stretched senseless in the gutter; or rolling in the mud on the highway; or staggering into the midst of his unhappy family, besmeared with blood and dirt."

He dwelt at length upon "the evils resulting from the use of the bottle." It destroyed character, impaired reason, brought poverty and shame upon the innocent members of the drunkard's family, and finally damned the disheveled victim himself to the bottomless pit.

"But who hath put the bottle to his neighbor?" inquired Dr. Smith. The liquor seller? Yes, but the responsibility lay deeper than this. The landlord "who rented the liquor seller the house in which his traffic

was conducted"—who put money above human happiness, material gain above "the souls of men"—was equally guilty. But wait before passing sentence upon these culprits! No matter how guilty they may be before God, "neither has violated the law of the land." What about the Legislature that "gave the liquor seller the legal authority to conduct his traffic?" And the Governor who approved it?

The Legislators and the chief executive, however, are merely servants of the people, Dr. Smith reminded his audience, who acted "under the conviction that they were doing their will and pleasure." Therefore, it was the people, the voters, who were really responsible for the drunkard's plight.

The remedy? "The most effectual would be the passage of a law altogether abolishing the liquor traffic, except for mechanical, chemical, medicinal and sacramental purposes, and so framed that no principle of the constitution of the state or of the United States be violated."

Should the Legislature now in session pass such a law and leave its adoption with the people, said Dr. Smith, "the most vigorous exertion should be made to secure that end by spreading information on the subject broadcast throughout the land."

In conclusion, the speaker warned the delegates against discouragement: "Should our present Legislature take no salutory action on the subject, perseverance in the work, and a Dependence upon the Divine

blessing, will infallibly secure a final and glorious victory."

Dr. Smith's address seems to have been most enthusiastically received, and next day he was handed the following note:

"Rev. James Smith, D.D.

Sir:

The undersigned having listened with great satisfaction to the discourse on the subject of temperance, delivered by you last evening, and believing that, if published and circulated among the people, it would be productive of good, would respectfully request a copy thereof for publication."

Among the thirty-nine signers of this communication were Simeon Francis, editor of the Illinois State Journal, one of Lincoln's most intimate friends, and John T. Stuart, his first law partner, and the last name on the list was that of Abraham Lincoln himself.[3]

Lincoln's signature to the request for the publication of Dr. Smith's speech frequently has been cited as conclusive evidence that he advocated prohibition. Certainly, the movement to wipe out liquor traffic by legislative enactment was becoming increasingly popular among the Illinois Whigs. And no one can positively say that Lincoln was not one of those who favored it. But it is only fair to observe that his signature does not necessarily prove this to be so. Reading the "Discourse," it is possible to agree entirely with Dr. Smith as to the "evils" of intemperance without acquiescence in his

[3] A photostatic copy of this address entitled: "A discourse on the Bottle—its Evils, and the Remedy," with the note and list of signers, is in the possession of the author.

"remedy," and, therefore, any temperance man, as Lincoln surely was, might well think the publication of the address "productive of good," and still not be a prohibitionist.

Furthermore, it is now known that at this time Lincoln considered himself under very deep obligations to Dr. Smith. Young Eddie Lincoln had died of diphtheria on February 1, 1850, and the funeral had been conducted by the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church.[4] Shaken and disconsolate over the loss of his little boy, the religious doubts and misgivings of Lincoln's early manhood again rose up to perplex him.

Finding him, as Dr. Smith says, "much depressed and downcast at the death of his son, and without the consolation of the Gospel," the doctor had a long talk with Lincoln, and loaned him a copy of a book which he had written entitled: "The Christian's Defense," a militant assault upon agnosticism and infidelity.[5] This volume gave the distressed father much comfort, and shortly thereafter Lincoln rented a pew in the First Presbyterian Church, which he kept as long as he lived in Springfield.[6]

Under the existing circumstances, irrespective of other motives, it is apparent that personal consideration alone would have justified Lincoln's gesture of

[4] Illinois Daily Journal, Feb. 2, 1852.

[5] Dr. Smith, in Barton's "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln," 162.

[6] Dr. Smith, in Barton's "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln," 156. Townsend, 227-231. Lincoln appointed Dr. Smith consul at Dundee, Scotland, which position he held until his death in 1871.

courtesy, if such it was, in joining his friends and neighbors in the request for the publication of Dr. Smith's temperance speech.

At any rate, the lobbying of the prohibition forces and the circulation of the Smith pamphlet seemed about to achieve the desired result, when, on February 4, 1853, a select legislative committee, to which all liquor petitions had been referred, reported "an Act for the suppression of drinking houses and tippling shops," which was almost an exact duplicate of the Maine Law.[7]

On February 7th, the "Quart Law" was repealed, apparently for the purpose of clearing the way for the enactment of the great reform measure. But on the 12th, much to the chagrin of the temperance leaders, the "Maine Law" was defeated, and on the same day an Act was passed which reinstated the license system substantially as it had existed prior to 1851.[8]

However, the prohibition movement soon rallied from this temporary setback, and its forces returned to the assault more determined than ever. On May 22, 1854, the people of Springfield voted to prohibit the sale of liquor within the city limits, which became effective August 1st of that year.[9] Lincoln's law partner was then mayor, and, though himself addicted to the liquor habit, Herndon was a staunch prohibitionist, and

[7] Senate Journal, 18th General Assembly, 285.
[8] General Laws of Illinois, 18th General Assembly, 91-92.
[9] Illinois State Journal, June 3, 1854.

entered upon the enforcement of this law with all the ardor of his impetuous nature.[10]

At last, when the Legislature convened in January 1855, the prohibition tide was too strong to be stemmed. On January 20th, "an Act for the suppression of intemperance and to amend Chapter 30 of the Revised Statutes," more stringent in some respects than the original Maine Law, passed the House by a vote of 42 to 26, and on February 9th, the Senate adopted it by a vote of 17 to 7.[11]

Vigorous opposition, however, had forced the advocates of the bill to concede an amendment which prevented the measure from becoming effective until it had been ratified by the people of the state at an election to be held June 4, 1855. During the four months which followed, the fight for votes was one of the most bitter ever waged in Illinois.

This contest came at an exceedingly inopportune time for Lincoln, who was doing his utmost to arouse public sentiment against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.[12] And the anti-slavery men were sharply

[10] "I went personally to some, if not most of the groceries in our city . . . and told them they *must* close their doors. . . . Women and children can now walk through our streets, highways and alleys, at all hours, night or day, with scarce a fear of insult or harm." Valedictory of William H. Herndon, Illinois State Journal, Apr. 11, 1855.

[11] Illinois House Journal, 1855, 411; Laws of Illinois, 1855, 3-30.

[12] For an editorial written by Lincoln, see Illinois State Journal, Sept. 11, 1854, Angle, 132. In his Springfield speech, July 17, 1858, Lincoln stated that he believed the repeal of the Missouri Compromise was "the beginning of a conspiracy" to make slavery "perpetual, national and universal. . . . So believing, I have since then considered that question a paramount one." Works, III, 174.

divided on the question of prohibition. Billy Herndon stoutly favored it.[13] So did Judge Stephen T. Logan, Lincoln's second law partner, who had been in active charge of the bill when it passed the House. So did Editor Simeon Francis.

On the other hand, the foreign born citizens of the state were almost solidly against prohibition. This was especially true of the 90,000 Germans, who could send to the polls 20,000 votes, and the Germans were as much opposed to the extension of slavery as they were to liquor reform.[14]

Many of Lincoln's warm personal and political friends, like Jacob Bunn, of Springfield,[15] and Jesse Fell, of Bloomington,[16] were against the new law.

Moreover, Lincoln was then an active candidate for the United States Senate,[17] and he was not only industriously canvassing the members of the Legislature, but his letters show that, like any other good politician, he

[13] "Our Legislature has passed a Maine Law—I am for it, as you may suppose—to take effect if the people vote for it. I think they will." Herndon to Theodore Parker, Feb. 13, 1855. Newton, 77. "Our State Register —slaveite whisky paper—attacked our prohibitory law and I was called on to defend." Same to Same, Apr. 12, 1855. Ibid. 78.

[14] Koerner, I, 623.

[15] Bunn was a large wholesale and retail grocer, and Lincoln's regular client. John W. Bunn to Isaac N. Phillips, Nov. 8, 1910. Phillips, 145. In 1859, when Lincoln secretly bought a German newspaper, The Staats-Anzeiger, his trusted friend Bunn handled the transaction for him. Angle, 204.

[16] A leading anti-slavery man, Fell was in 1855 against prohibition. Beveridge, III, 294. Fell was the first man to publicly espouse Lincoln's cause as the Republican candidate for President.

[17] I have really got it into my head to try to be United States Senator, and, if I could have your support, my chances would be reasonably good." Lincoln to J. Gillispie, Dec. 1, 1854. Works, II, 265.

was extremely anxious to avoid giving offense in any way to those whose assistance he sought.[18]

Three days after the election, Lincoln wrote his old circuit-riding companion, Henry C. Whitney, lamenting that Logan, who had been a candidate for the Supreme Court, was "worse beaten than any other man ever was since elections were invented," and closed his letter with the remark: "It is conceded on all hands that the prohibitory law is also beaten."[19] The most diligent search through many years has failed to reveal any other reference that Lincoln ever made to this exceedingly vituperative campaign.

But Herndon was not so complacent over the defeat of the cause to which he was earnestly devoted. On October 30, 1855, he wrote Parker: "As I wrote you once before, we got badly beaten in our temperance move, and the reason is that human rights float in the bubbles of whiskey which swim on the fire surface. Though defeated, we are not conquered. It is very hard to overcome interest, appetite, habit and the low demagogue who rules the synod in the grocery."[20]

For almost a half-century, no claim was ever made that Lincoln had taken any part whatever in the prohibition struggle of 1855. While the contest itself was raging, and for years afterward, Herndon wrote regu-

[18] Lincoln to J. M. Palmer, Sept. 7, 1854; Same to T. J. Henderson, Nov. 27, 1854; Same to E. B. Washburne, Dec. 14, 1854. Works, II, 187, 263, 267.

[19] Lincoln to Whitney, June 7, 1855. Works, XI, 101-2.

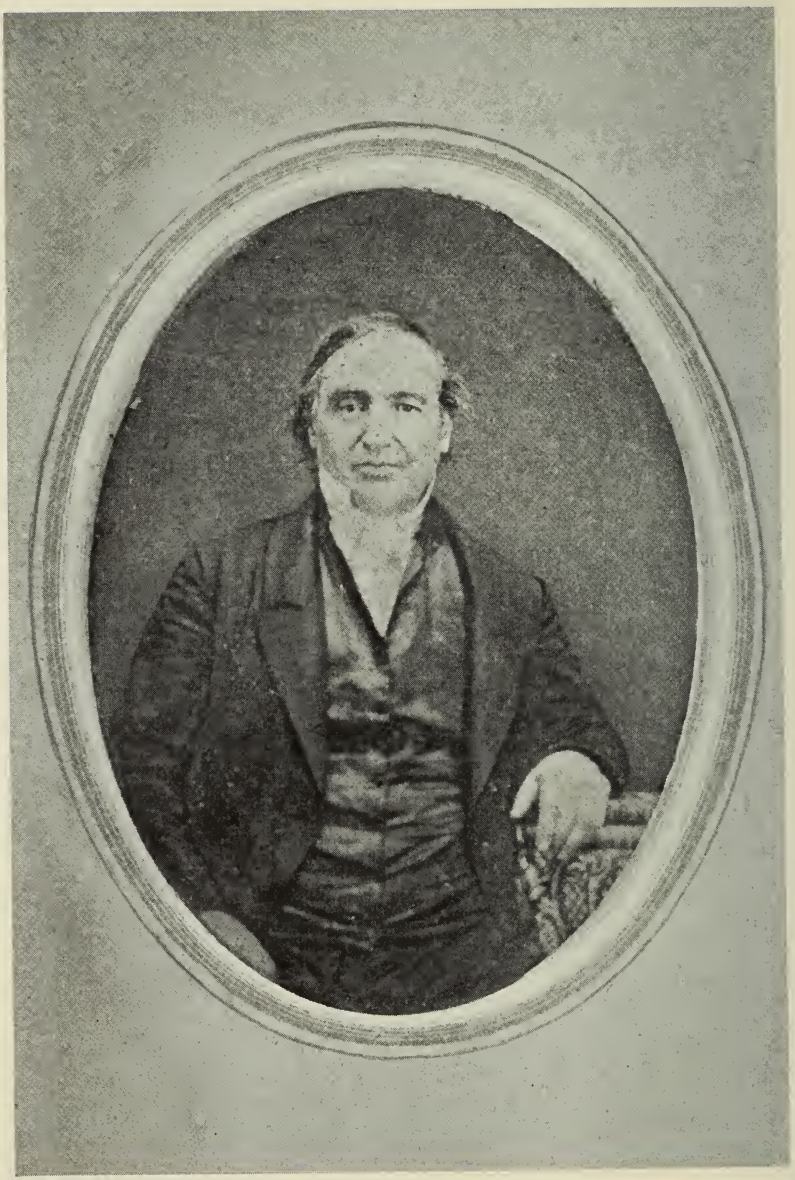
[20] Newton, 83.

larly to Theodore Parker, the noted theologian, abolitionist and temperance advocate of Boston. Frequently he mentioned his law partner's anti-slavery activities, and sent Parker Lincoln's "best wishes," and spoke freely of his own efforts on behalf of prohibition, but there is not a single word in all this correspondence that mentions Lincoln in that connection.[21]

Later on, the alert, diligent Herndon collected a vast store of reminiscences from those who had known Lincoln intimately, and there is not a line in all this material indicating that he participated in the Maine Law campaign. There is, however, an interview with James Gourley, Lincoln's next door neighbor for sixteen years, in which he positively states that Lincoln "took no part in the great temperance move when an Act of the Legislature was passed and submitted to the people," and Herndon, who certainly knew whether this was true or not, wrote the statement down carefully, without dissent.[22]

In 1872, Ward H. Lamon, Lincoln's law partner at Danville, and one of his closest friends, published a "Life of Lincoln," in which he declared that Lincoln "disliked sumptuary laws and would not prescribe by statute what other men should eat or drink. When the temperance men ran to the Legislature to invoke the power of the state, his voice—the most eloquent of them—was silent. He did not oppose them, but

[21] Newton, 72, et seq.
[22] Statement of James Gourley, Herndon-Lamon MSS.



Rev. James W. Smith, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield

quietly withdrew from the cause and left others to manage it."[23]

And, though Herndon, Browning, Swett, Davis, Trumbull and others discussed Lamon's book critically and at length, this statement went unchallenged.[24] Simeon Francis, whose devotion to Lincoln and to prohibition is beyond question, made no denial in the pages of his Journal, or elsewhere.

In 1874, Messrs. Davidson and Stuve published in Springfield "A Complete History of Illinois from 1673-1873," which stated that "the Hon. B. S. Edwards, a lawyer of ability and eminent standing, framed" the prohibition bill. Ten years later, while Mr. Edwards was still living, a second edition of this history, revised in some particulars, was brought out by a different publisher, but this information about the authorship of the Maine Law legislation remained unmodified.

Thus matters stood as to Lincoln and the prohibition issue of 1855, until Thursday afternoon, May 26, 1904, after Herndon and Browning and Davis and Francis and Logan and Swett and Lamon and Edwards and Trumbull, and every other close associate of Lincoln were all dead, when James B. Merwin, seventy-five years of age, delivered an address at the Lincoln tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery.[25] Merwin, a native of Greene County, New York, early in the fifties had edited a temperance news-

[23] Lamon, 480.

[24] Newton, 306, 309; Diary of O. H. Browning, II, 366.

[25] This address was first published in a temperance journal called "The New Voice," June 16, 1904.

paper at Hartford, Connecticut, and had been active in the state-wide prohibition campaign which swept New England after Maine went dry in 1851. Thereafter, he had been a journalist and a professional temperance lecturer.

On this occasion, at the Lincoln tomb, Merwin broke a silence of nearly fifty years, and declared that in the autumn of 1854 he had arrived in Springfield for the purpose of assisting in the Maine Law campaign; that he had made a speech before a temperance meeting held in the State House, after which the crowd had called for Lincoln, who, thereupon, delivered such an address upon the "definition of law, its design and mission, its object and power, as few present had ever dreamed of." Merwin then said that he and Lincoln had stumped the state together for prohibition. "In that memorable canvass," said he, "Mr. Lincoln and myself spoke in Jacksonville, in Bloomington, in Decatur, in Danville, in Carlinville, in Peoria, and at many other places."

Although he undertook to quote from memory the exact words of Lincoln's speeches, Merwin made no mention at this time that Lincoln had been the author, or had taken any part in the drafting of the Illinois measure. Apparently, he did not recall this important fact until several years later, but on July 5, 1910, in response to an inquiry from Dr. F. D. Blakeslee, of Binghamton, New York, District Superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League, as to Lincoln's "temperance prin-

ciples," Merwin announced that "Mr. Lincoln drew the prohibitory law."[26]

The startling news that Abraham Lincoln had not only campaigned for prohibition in Illinois, but had actually drafted the law itself, received wide publicity through the temperance press, and, despite his advanced age, Merwin became very much in demand at various meetings sponsored by the Anti-Saloon League.

The 16th national convention of the Anti-Saloon League was held in Atlantic City, July 6-9, 1915. Dr. Howard O. Russell, founder of the League, presented Merwin to the delegates as "a man who was an intimate friend of Abraham Lincoln, to give us his testimony first hand." Under interrogation by Dr. Russell, Merwin then told of his relations with Lincoln in Illinois, and later during the Civil War.[27] In doing so, however, he stated that he was "eighty years old last May," when, in fact, he was eighty-six,[28] and he fixed the year that he went to Springfield as 1852 instead of 1854.

At the close of the interview, questions were invited from the audience, and an inquisitive, perhaps skeptical, delegate asked:

"Mr. Merwin, will you tell me how you know Mr. Lincoln wrote that prohibition law for Illinois?"

To which the old man made an exceedingly nebulous reply: "Yes, with great pleasure, too, because he said of

[26] White, 155.

[27] Proceedings of the 16thNational Convention of the Anti-Saloon League of America, 264-273.

[28] Merwin "was born in Cairo, Greene County, New York, in 1829." White, 87.

it when it was written, 'I know it will hold water, but I want to know whether it will hold whiskey or not.' He sent me to twenty-five or thirty of the leading judges and lawyers of the State of Illinois with a copy of that law to submit to them whether it would hold prohibition and be effective."

Merwin then exhibited to the audience a large gold watch, saying that "after the campaign ended he (Lincoln) made me a present of this.

"I want to fix in your mind, brethren and sisters," he emphasized, "that Mr. Lincoln then and there, without any solicitation or prompting upon the part of anyone, drew this inscription that is on the watch."

Engraved upon the dust lid of this very handsome timepiece was the following:

"Presented by the friends of temperance in Chicago to J. B. Merwin, Corresponding Secretary of the Illinois State Maine Law Alliance, as a token of their confidence and regard for his untiring energy and perseverence in the campaign of 1855, for Prohibition. Inscription written by Abraham Lincoln."[29]

Then on March 31, 1917, three days before he died, Merwin made a still more detailed statement, in which, referring to the first time he ever saw Lincoln, at the State House in Springfield, in the autumn of 1854, he said: "After the meeting, I introduced myself to him, told him my mission to Springfield, and we went to his home together. I had with me a copy of the Maine Law, and we sat up all night looking over that statute. I was

[29] For a photograph of this watch, with inscription, see White, Opp. 86.

a young man of about twenty-six, and Lincoln was about forty-five. . . . Mr. Lincoln set to work to frame a law, and he worked at it almost constantly for days. After he had completed it, he had me take it around the state to get the views of his lawyer friends, and of those most interested. . . . In 1855, he made more than a score of addresses in the campaign waged under the direction of the Illinois State Maine Law Alliance that year for the state-wide prohibition of the liquor traffic. . . . Lincoln was heart and soul in favor of it."[30]

Since publication, Merwin's story has provoked extensive comment with pronounced differences of opinion. On the whole, prohibitionists and liberals have either accepted or rejected it, according to their own personal attitude toward the liquor question, but, even among serious and honest Lincoln students, Merwin is not without his champions.[31] It is submitted, however, with all possible deference to those who have heretofore expressed themselves upon this matter, that the present study is the first effort to critically analyze Merwin's statements in the light of exhaustive research.

So far as a diligent examination of the record reveals, Merwin's sponsors rest their case upon the tangible evidence of the watch which Merwin says Lincoln inscribed and presented to him, and upon an alleged corroboration of Merwin by Henry B. Rankin, of Spring-

[30] White, 147.

[31] Among these are: "Lincoln and Prohibition," by Charles T. White; "Latest Light on Abraham Lincoln," by Dr. Erwin Chapman; "Footprints of Abraham Lincoln," by Dr. J. T. Hobson.

field, and A. J. Baber, of Paris, Illinois. For convenience, this evidence will be examined in the order named.

There is no room for doubt that the watch was presented to Merwin "by the friends of temperance in Chicago." The Northwestern Christian Advocate of June 13, 1855, contains an account of this incident under title of "Pleasant Ceremonies," which occurred "at the office of the N. W. C. Advocate, on the evening of the 8th inst.[32]

"The meeting was numerously attended by the members of the press, the pastors of churches, and the principal and most influential citizens of our city," and the reporter mentions some of the most prominent by name. "Rev. Mr. Watson, Editor of the Northwestern," having been "called upon to state the object of the meeting," did so, and "then proceeded, as instructed by the appreciative donors, to present Mr. Merwin a beautiful and massive gold watch which cost upwards of $200.00, on tendering of which Mr. W. made the following characteristically felicitous and pertinent address."

Mr. Watson's remarks, highly ornate, according to the style of the times, interspersed with biblical allusions and quotations from the poets, are too long to be given in full, but in the midst of his address he dramatically approached Mr. Merwin and said:

"Turn, sir, . . . to the words fitly spoken, inscribed on a less perishable material than the pages of rock,

[32] See files of Northwestern Christian Advocate, Garrett Biblical Institution, Evanston, Ill.

prayed for by the patient patriarch of Uz. Open, sir, the golden gates of that elegant souvenir and read: 'Presented by the friends of temperance in Chicago to J. B. Merwin, Corresponding Secretary of the Illinois State Maine Law Alliance, as a token of their confidence and regard for his untiring energy and perseverance in the campaign of 1855, for Prohibition.' "

There is no mention whatever of the last line: "Inscription written by Abraham Lincoln," which later appeared upon the watch. No mention of Lincoln's name throughout the entire proceedings. Not a word indicating Lincoln's presence, notwithstanding the fact that he was already such an important public figure that the newspapers always noted his visits to Chicago.[33]

Obviously nothing further need be said about the watch as substantive or any evidence in support of Merwin's story.

On May 6, 1917, John W. Starr, Jr., of Millersburg, Pennsylvania, Lincoln student and author who had been in correspondence with Merwin, wrote Henry B. Rankin, one of Springfield's oldest citizens, asking him about Merwin's association with Lincoln. And on the 10th Rankin replied: "In the temperance campaign of 1854-55, I was a youth of 17 yrs and at school. I have a general recollection of the Springfield lawyers who favored the Maine Law election in Illinois then—B. S. Edwards, S. T. Logan, W. H. Herndon, Abraham

[33] See Chicago Daily Journal, Oct. 30, 1854; The Daily Democratic Press, July 9, 1855; Angle, "Day by Day," 43-80.

Lincoln, J. H. Matheny are among them. I consider Major J. B. Merwin a truthful, reliable man, and that what he says would be substantially correct."[34]

It will be observed that here Rankin merely states that Lincoln "favored" the prohibition law. Nothing is said about any activity on his part, but, like Merwin, Rankin's memory seemed to improve with age. Four years later, at eighty-four, he wrote Charles T. White:[35]

"Lincoln prepared the first draft of the law for submission to the Legislature. He took it over to Judge S. T. Logan's office for any change the judge thought should be made. They both discussed the act as Lincoln had drawn it. The judge had the manuscript several days and added such revisions and changes as he deemed would facilitate its adoption by the Legislature, and took it back to Lincoln. Lincoln approved of the judge's alterations. They then canvassed the matter as to who would be most proper to present it to some member of the Legislature to bring before the Legislature.

"Lincoln advised that they both go over to the law office of Stuart & Edwards (both of whom had gone over from the Whig to the Democrat party after the compromise measures of 1850 had passed) and submit the manuscript to B. S. Edwards, and, if he approved it, then to insist that he bring it before such members of the Legislature—on the Democratic side—who would

[34] Quoted in letter from Starr to the author, May 23, 1932.
[35] Letter dated Feb. 28, 1921, White, 69.

introduce it free of any of the Whig odor of Logan, or the free-soil Whigism of Lincoln.

"This was done. Edwards consented, and adopted the Act as they had prepared it. He copied the manuscript in his own handwriting and interested his party friends in the Legislature to secure its adoption. All three thus had a hand in it. I heard Edwards in a speech in the courthouse at Petersburg in 1855 advocating its adoption by the referendum then before the state, say that he wrote the law."

The wealth of detail in this letter about an incident which had occurred sixty-six years before, written by one who had been, as he wrote Starr, "a youth of 17 and at school," and who in 1917 had only "a general recollection" of those who "favored the Maine Law," is truly amazing.

If Rankin, as we must assume, did not know these details at the time he wrote Starr in 1917, from whom did he learn them later? All of Lincoln's Illinois associates, personal and political, had long since passed away. He did not claim to have had his memory refreshed by existing records, newly discovered or otherwise.

If, on the other hand, Rankin did know that Lincoln was the author of the prohibition measure before 1917, the matter is all the more inexplicable.

In 1910, Rev. Joseph Fort Newton, with access to many hitherto unpublished documents, particularly the full correspondence between Herndon and Theodore

Parker, wrote a brilliant book entitled "Lincoln and Herndon." In his preface, he acknowledges his indebtedness to "Mr. Henry B. Rankin, whose reminiscences and suggestions were invaluable," yet Newton, in discussing the Maine Law contest in Illinois, declares: "Lincoln—neither prohibitionist nor abolitionist—held aloof, not wishing to divert attention from the supreme question of the age."[36]

Did Rankin tell Newton this? It would be unfair to infer that he did. But certainly he did not, in his "reminiscences and suggestions," tell Newton what he later wrote Starr and White.

After the publication of "Lincoln and Herndon," Rankin had six years in which to meditate upon Newton's error before writing a book of his own in 1916, styled "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln." At the beginning of this volume, Rankin announces the motive which had induced him, after all these years, to write of Lincoln. "There are," he says "certain important parts of his life and of influences that were strong there in the development of the inner and greater Lincoln, that have never been told. Some of these told are sadly defective. There are slurs and caricatures, luminous with their distortions, that I wish to see removed as excrescences from many of the so-called 'accepted historical accounts' of the personality of Lincoln."[37]

[36] Newton, 77.
[37] Rankin, "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," 8.

Then Rankin marches blithely through 399 pages, flashing his bright blade of truth, lopping off "excrescences," puncturing "myths," adding here and there some illuminating and hitherto unknown incident in his hero's life. At one point he speaks of Lincoln's conviction "of the evils of trafficking in and using ardent spirits,"[38] and one would suppose that this reference should have reminded the author of the "so-called accepted historical accounts" that Lincoln, as Lamon says, "disliked sumptuary laws and would not prescribe by statute what other men should eat or drink," and, as Gourley says, "took no part in the great temperance movement," and, as stated by Newton, was no "prohibitionist" and "held aloof." Yet the author finally brings his book to a close, leaving this hoary "excrescence" serenely intact.

However, readers who are inclined to accept Merwin's story, and Rankin as a corroborating witness, may seek to excuse Rankin's singular omission by saying that Starr did not write Rankin about Merwin's claim until 1917, a year after the "Personal Recollections" were published, nor did Rankin write White until 1921, and that, if Rankin had written another book he would certainly have published to the world what he had set down at length in personal communications.

There are two things which would, of course, impair the plausibility of this contention. One is that Rankin, having lived in Springfield all those years, quite familiar

[38] Rankin, "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln" 80.

with Lincoln literature, knew perfectly well what Lamon, Newton and others had said about Lincoln and the prohibition campaign of 1855, and must have been acutely aware of the local tradition about it. And the other is that Rankin did write a second book.

In 1924, seven years after he had told Starr that Lincoln favored prohibition and "substantially" endorsed Merwin, and three years after he had informed White that Lincoln was, in fact, the author of the Illinois Maine Law, Rankin published a volume entitled "Intimate Character Sketches of Abraham Lincoln," consisting of 335 pages. With Merwin dead, but his story still under fire, the Eighteenth Amendment adopted and in full force, national prohibition at its floodtide, memorials being erected throughout the country to those hardy, courageous pioneers in the great movement which had slowly but finally achieved its goal—how appropriate it would have been for Rankin in this book to have both vindicated Merwin and placed a new wreath upon the brow of Abraham Lincoln!

In searching these pages of Rankin's second book, one finds reference to "the early days of temperance reform," but again the author is wholly silent on Lincoln and prohibition.

Of course, there may be some who attach derogatory significance to the fact that Rankin, after the elapse of sixty-four years, in private correspondence, readily identified Lincoln as a prohibitionist, and finally as the author of the Illinois law, but omitted to do so on the

two occasions when he had an opportunity to reveal this important information publicly. But waiving this, and attributing to the old man every integrity of purpose, it is apparent that his attempted corroboration of Merwin is altogether unconvincing.[39]

The remaining evidence which is alleged to confirm Merwin grows out of a letter which John G. Woolley, a temperance writer, wrote in January 1914, to A. J. Baber, eighty-two years of age, who was a prominent citizen of Paris, Edgar County, Illinois, asking Baber to tell him what he knew of Lincoln as a temperance man. Apparently, Woolley referred to Lincoln as a prohibitionist, because Baber replied:[40]

"I *know* he was a full-fledged temperance man, but as to being a prohibitionist I have forgotten whether he was really a prohibitionist, but I know he was an ardent temperance man." Baber went on to relate that he became acquainted with Lincoln when he came to attend the Edgar Circuit Court. "Lincoln would follow the circuit; this brought him to Paris twice a year for quite a number of years.

"While at court session in 1855," continued Baber, "my business called me to Paris, and I saw Lincoln and Ficklin, Linder and Judge Harlan, sitting in the shade of the Paris House. I went to where they were."

[39] Rev. William E. Barton, noted Lincoln authority, seriously doubted the accuracy of Rankin's recollections concerning Abraham Lincoln. Barton, "Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman," 92-94.

[40] Baber to Woolley, Jan. 24, 1914, White, 150.

During the conversation "Lincoln spoke up and said that Col. Baldwin had invited him to come to his place and make a temperance speech, and it was about time he was going—Linder and Ficklin opposed his going—rather made sport of it," but after a while, no one having come for him, "Lincoln started afoot and walked to the place of speaking, six miles out. . . . It was a hot day and Lincoln wore a long linen duster and made the trip just to make a temperance speech—walked six miles on a hot day."

Doubtless Baber was doing his best to accurately recall an incident which, as he thought, occurred fifty-nine years before. Certainly, if Lincoln made a temperance speech in 1855, prior to June 4th of that year, it could hardly have failed to be in favor of prohibition. But the surrounding circumstances strongly indicate that Baber was mistaken as to time.

It is quite true, as Baber says, that Lincoln often came to Edgar County on his trips around the circuit, but in 1853, Edgar and several other counties were cut off from the Eighth Judicial Circuit that Lincoln regularly traveled.[41]

Moreover, only one session of the Edgar Circuit Court was held in 1855, and this convened on April 16th and adjourned April 26th.[42]

The records show that from Monday, April 9th, to Friday, April 20th, the McLean Circuit Court was in

[41] Angle, "Abraham Lincoln—Circuit Lawyer." Lincoln Centennial Association papers, 1928, 28.

[42] Order Book 4, 1, Edgar Circuit Court.

session at Bloomington, more than a hundred miles from Paris, with no rail connection, and that Lincoln was in attendance there; that on Saturday, April 21st, he was at Springfield, and that from Monday, April 23rd, to Wednesday, April 25th, he was trying cases every day in the Woodford Circuit Court at Metamora, more than one hundred and fifty miles from Paris.[43]

According to the order books of the Paris Circuit Court, Lincoln had no cases at the Spring Term in 1855, and, in fact, none after the Spring Term of 1853, when Edgar County was transferred to another judicial district.[44]

Furthermore, it will be noticed that Baber says that Linder "opposed" Lincoln's temperance appointment—"rather made sport of it," but this could not have occurred after the beginning of 1854, since Linder was himself an avowed prohibitionist, and on February 22, 1854, addressed the Maine Law Alliance at Springfield.

"Mr. Linder came full into the field," says the Illinois Journal, "and pointed out a course for the friends of prohibition which he thought would secure the passage of a law by the next Legislature, to carry out that principle. Mr. Linder was eloquent, and his

[43] Angle: "Lincoln Day by Day," 67-69. Distances are reckoned according to public highways as shown by Peck & Messinger's map of Illinois, 1853 Ed.

[44] Letter from Arnold Moss, Circuit Clerk, to the author, Oct. 25, 1933. See also letter from Lincoln to Jacob Harding, editor of "Paris-Prairie Beacon," May 25, 1855, which indicates that he had not been in Paris for a considerable length of time. Tracy, 57; Angle: "Lincoln Day by Day," 73.

speech sparkled with wit, irony, and occasionally a touch of sarcasm."[45]

It can hardly be doubted that the incident described by Baber, which Merwin's defenders have emphasized so strongly, actually did happen at some time or another, but that it occurred in 1855 is beyond reasonable probability. Both Rankin and Baber, as old men are wont to do, simply mixed imagination with their memories.

Having considered in detail the testimony which is usually cited in confirmation of the Merwin story, the following observations from Lincoln's own son would seem to finally dispose of the matter. Shortly after Merwin's death, Mr. Charles T. White wrote Robert T. Lincoln, who promptly replied:

"You will perhaps be surprised to know that I never heard of James B. Merwin until a few months ago when someone wrote me in regard to some of his quotations of my father. I, thereupon, obtained a book I had not before seen called 'Footprints of Abraham Lincoln,' by Rev. J. T. Hobson, and in this book I found much mention of Mr. Merwin, and I must confess to you that I was dumfounded to know that my father had a friend who claimed such intimacy with him, and of whom I knew nothing whatever.

"I was surprised, too, by some of his statements which indicated that he accompanied my father on a long temperance campaign in Illinois at a time when I supposed my father was giving all the attention he could possibly take away from his professional work, upon which depended his living, in a campaign against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. You will find in Nicolay & Hay reference to the political work, but none to the temperance work at any such time.

[45] Illinois Journal, Feb. 23, 1854.

"You may think that I was too young to do so, but I very well remember that political campaign of my father, and even drove him to a number of meetings; if it is true, as I believe it is, that I never heard him speak of Merwin, it is at least queer." [46]

In conclusion, it may also be pointed out that no personal letter or document written by any of Lincoln's contemporaries has ever been found which supports the contention that Lincoln took any part in the Illinois Maine Law election. And the most careful examination of Illinois newspapers has failed to disclose any reference to Lincoln's connection with it, although notices of meetings, and the names of speakers frequently appear.

The Illinois State Register, leading Democratic organ in Central Illinois, which Herndon called a "slaveite whiskey paper," was strongly opposed to the reform movement.[47] The anti-prohibition Germans were Democrats, but Lincoln was drawing them rapidly into the party opposed to slavery. The Register would have been quick to circulate any news of Lincoln's prohibition activities.

So we may be sure that Lincoln, with his usual astuteness, neither said nor did anything that might offend any group or faction of the anti-slavery element who opposed prohibition, and that, regardless of how he may have voted, he took no part in this contest that raged so fiercely about him in the eventful spring of 1855.

[46] Robert T. Lincoln to Charles T. White, Apr. 30, 1917. White, 159.
[47] Newton, 78; See Illinois State Register, Apr. 3, 1855, et seq.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPRINGFIELD YEARS

Springfield, when Abraham Lincoln moved there in 1837, was a rude, unattractive frontier town of less than two thousand inhabitants. Built around an open square, later occupied by the State House, the streets were entirely unimproved. In summer traffic stirred up clouds of dust that settled like a pall over houses and shrubbery. In winter wagons sank to the hubs and horses to their knees in the black sticky mire.

But the town, proud, wide-awake and eager for distinction, had just achieved its greatest civic ambition. It was now the capital of the state. New buildings were going up, the population was increasing—signs of the steady growth which in a few years made Springfield one of the most prosperous cities in Central Illinois.

Society, although comparatively free and easy after the pioneer manner, was not without its cliques and select groups, the aristocracy being largely of Kentucky origin. The use of alcoholic beverages was, of course, quite general, and its presence at banquets and other festive functions is frequently mentioned in the public press.

Reading the records, one does not find much mention of drinking on the part of the clergy, as was true of

an earlier day.[1] The temperance movement of the forties seemed to have militantly arrayed the ministers on the side of reform, but the members of the legal profession showed no such hostility toward liquor.

The Springfield lawyers, including Lincoln, generally prepared their briefs in the Supreme Court Library at the State House, and one of them relates that "with but few exceptions, they drank their toddy," making frequent visits to a jug of good whisky which Col. Warren, the Clerk of the Court, "usually hid from sight, but which was never so cleverly concealed that the wise ones could not find it."[2]

Out on the circuit, tippling shops and tap-rooms clustered about the courthouse, and when a court was established in Christian County, the two buildings first erected were a courthouse and a saloon.[3]

Examinations for admission to the bar were exceedingly lax and informal, and it was customary for the young applicant to provide a bottle of whisky or brandy for the delectation of the examiner. This Mr. Bodkin of Alton found out when he appeared before Judge Thomas C. Brown of the Supreme Court. No liquor being in sight, the eminent jurist inquired:

"Are you a judge of good brandy?"

Bodkin took the hint, and soon a flask of the best brandy and a bowl of loaf sugar were set before His

[1] See "Autobiography of Peter Cartwright," the Methodist circuit rider.
[2] Herndon in Weik, 207.
[3] "Recollections of the Bench & Bar of Central Illinois," address by James C. Conkling, Jan. 12, 1881—Fergus Historical Series, No. 22.

Honor, who sipped a stiff toddy meditatively before beginning the examination.

Presently he asked: "Mr. Bodkin, have you read Blackstone and Chitty?"

"Oh, yes, sir," replied Bodkin.

"What do you think of them as authors?"

"I think highly of them," said Bodkin.

Judge Brown mixed himself another toddy.

"Have you read Shakespeare?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes," answered Bodkin.

"You greatly admire him, Mr. Bodkin?"

"Oh, beyond all the power of language to express," exclaimed Bodkin.

"Do you know there was no such person as Shakespeare?" asked Brown.

"Indeed I did not," confessed Bodkin.

"It is true," solemnly declared the judge. "Then you do not know who wrote the work entitled 'The Plays of Shakespeare'?"

"If he did not write them, I do not know," replied the bewildered Bodkin.

"Would you like to know?" asked the judge.

"I certainly would," was the answer.

"Then," said Brown, with ponderous gravity, "as you have shown in this examination the highest qualifications to be admitted to the bar, I will say to you, in the strictest confidence, what I have never said to



Bar of the Tremont House in Chicago

anyone before, that *I* am the author of those plays! Mr. Bodkin, write out your license, and I will sign it."[4]

Lincoln, at least during the early years of his Springfield residence, continued to observe the rule of total abstinence which he had practiced in New Salem. Joshua Speed, whose intimate association with Lincoln began on the very first day of his arrival,[5] and continued until the spring of 1841, when Speed returned to Kentucky, says: "He had no vices, even as a young man. . . . Most men who have been great students, such as he was, in their hours of idleness, have taken to the bottle, to cards or dice. He had no fondness for any of these."[6]

It is interesting to note Lincoln's first recorded contact with the evil of excessive drinking in his new surroundings. A shoemaker who lived near his office was in the habit of getting drunk and whipping his wife. Lincoln warned him that if he did not quit it he would thrash him, and for a while things went along quietly. But a few weeks later the shoemaker again resorted to his favorite pastime, and Lincoln and James Matheny dragged him over into the back yard of the courthouse, stripped off his shirt and tied him to the town pump. Then they sent for his wife, gave her a long, limber switch and told her to "light in," which, as Matheny says, "she did lustily and well." Of course, the culprit

[4] Linder, 74.

[5] "It was in the spring of 1837, and on the very day that he obtained his license that our intimate acquaintance began." Speed, 21.

[6] Speed to Herndon, Dec. 6, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

swore vengeance, but neither Lincoln nor Matheny ever heard any further reports of his misconduct.[7]

As to Lincoln's personal use of liquor after the fervor of the Washington movement had subsided, there is not complete agreement among those who knew him during the Springfield years.

"He told me," says Swett, "not more than a year before he was elected President, that he had never tasted liquor in his life."[8]

Leonard Swett first became acquainted with Lincoln in 1849, and remained one of his closest friends as long as he lived. Together they traveled the circuit for eleven years, stopping at the same country taverns and often sleeping in the same bed. Swett was an able lawyer, a man of strict integrity and unimpeachable veracity, and yet the numerous errors in the article where this statement appears, which he wrote in 1886, particularly as to his recollection of what Lincoln told him about his early life, is another striking illustration of the tricks which an old man's memory often plays upon him when he attempts to relate things he heard a long time ago.

The same may also be said of that fine old newspaper man, Horace White, who sometime in the nineties recalled that on one occasion Lincoln had said to him that he "had never taken a drink of any alcoholic beverage in the past twenty years."[9]

[7] Herndon (2 Vol. Ed.), I, 180.
[8] Swett in Rice, 455. This statement was made in 1886.
[9] Weik, 232.

Obviously if Lincoln had never "tasted liquor in his life," he would hardly have said to White that he had not taken a drink in twenty years. While on the other hand, if White's recollection was correct, it would appear that Swett's memory was at fault. Most probably both are in error as to the exact language Lincoln used in expressing the undisputed fact that he was not nor had he ever been a "liquor drinker," as that term was ordinarily understood.

John Hay declares that Lincoln, although he had no desire for alcoholic stimulants, did not remain "always on principle a total abstainer, as he was during a part of his early life in the fervor of the Washingtonian reform."[10]

In 1872, Ward Hill Lamon, whom Lincoln set down in his own handwriting as "entirely reliable and trustworthy—my particular friend", wrote that "Mr. Lincoln indulged in no sensual excesses; he ate moderately and drank temperately when he drank at all. . . . He had no taste for spiritous liquors, and when he took them it was a punishment to him, not an indulgence."[11] On July 4, 1889, he replied to a letter from Miss Kate Field: "You ask my recollection of Mr. Lincoln's views on the question of temperance and prohibition. I look upon him as one of the safest temperance men I ever knew. He was neither what might be called a 'drinking man,' a total abstainer, nor a prohibitionist."[12]

[10] "Life in the White House in the Time of Lincoln," by John Hay, Century Magazine, Nov. 1890.

[11] Lamon, 480.

[12] Kate Field's "Washington," Vol. X, No. 24, 371-372, Dec. 12, 1894.

And Lamon left a statement which was found among his papers after his death that "none of his nearest associates ever saw Mr. Lincoln voluntarily call for a drink," but that they had seen him "take whiskey with a little sugar in it to avoid the appearance of discountenancing it to his friends. If he could have avoided it without giving offense, he would have gladly done so."[13]

Lincoln Dubois, son of Jesse K. Dubois, one of Lincoln's very intimate political and personal friends, in his unpublished reminiscences, corroborates Lamon: "He decidedly was not what would be called a drinking man, but made no fuss about it at all; took it when offered, but seldom drank it."[14]

Herndon, who, of course, was in a better position than anyone else to know what his partner's personal habits were, is entirely silent on Lincoln's use of liquor, in his three-volume biography. But he wrote Jesse Weik, of Greencastle, Indiana, that Lincoln "did sometimes take a horn when he thought it would do him good," although "he had no very strong thirst or appetite for stimulating drinks or tonics."[15]

However, there must have been long intervals even in the later years when Lincoln was practically, if not actually, a total abstainer. Judge Ewing speaks of an incident which occurred in 1854 when he visited Stephen A. Douglas at his hotel in Bloomington. "A

[13] Lamon, "Recollections," 305.
[14] Dubois MSS, owned by Frank E. Stevens, Sycamore, Ill.
[15] Herndon to Weik, Feb. 5, 1887, Weik MSS.

pitcher of water, some glasses and a decanter of red liquor" stood on the table. Presently Lincoln came in, and, after a little conversation, Douglas said:

"Mr. Lincoln, won't you take something?"

"No, I think not," replied Lincoln.

"What!" exclaimed Douglas. "Are you a member of the Temperance Society?"

"No," said Lincoln, "I am not a member of any Temperance Society; but I am temperate in this, that I don't drink anything."[16]

The occasions on which Lincoln took "whiskey with a little sugar in it" must have been very rare at any period, because several of his associates agree with Judge Logan, who says: "I never in my life saw Lincoln taste liquor."[17]

Henry C. Whitney, who was on the circuit with Lincoln more than Logan, though not so much as Lamon, recalls an incident when he and Lincoln and several other lawyers drove out to the residence of Reason Hooten, near Danville, where several varieties of homemade wine were passed around. "A mere sip of each affected Lincoln," relates Whitney, "and he said

[16] Ewing in Phillips, 54-5. Lincoln's refusal in this instance would not have been surprising, in any case. He and Douglas were political rivals and Douglas was much addicted to liquor. During the "Debates," Lincoln remarked with unwonted severity: "I flatter myself that thus far my wife has not found it necessary to follow me around from place to place to keep me from getting drunk." Weik, 236.

[17] MSS dated July 6, 1875, owned by Mrs. Alice H. Wadsworth, Mt. Morris, N. Y.

comically, 'Fellers, I am getting drunk!' That was the nearest approach to inebriety I ever saw him."[18]

"I am entitled to little credit for not drinking," Lincoln told Herndon, "because I hate the stuff. It is unpleasant and always leaves me flabby and undone."[19]

And Judge Joseph Gillispie wrote Herndon that Lincoln "was a remarkably temperate man, eschewing every indulgence, not so much, as it seemed to me, from principle as a want of appetite."[20]

Fragments of the Diller Drug Store ledger contain occasional purchases of liquor charged to Lincoln and delivered to his residence, such as:

"1859—June 3, A. Lincoln
To bot. brandy $2.00
June 13, A. Lincoln
To bot. brandy $2.00" [21]

But James Gourley expressed the opinion, based upon observation as his next-door neighbor, that Lincoln "scarcely ever drank" and only "as a medicine, I think."[22] At any rate, it seems reasonably certain that the Lincolns did not keep liquor in their home for beverage purposes.

On Saturday evening, May 19, 1861, Lincoln received formal notification of his nomination as the

[18] Whitney, 157. [19] Herndon to Weik, Feb. 5, 1887, Wiek MSS.

[20] Gillispie to Herndon, Jan. 31, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS. "This excellent lawyer and skillful politician was one of the five or six men with whom Lincoln may be said ever to have been intimate." Beveridge, II, 219.

[21] Shutes, 58. These two items are the only liquor purchases shown by the ledgers for 1857, '58 and '59. Lincoln was in Chicago on the date of the first purchase. Angle, "Lincoln Day by Day," 283.

[22] James Gourley's statement, Herndon-Lamon MSS.

Republican candidate for President of the United States. Several hours before the Committee arrived, Gustave Koerner and Judge Peck went up to the Lincoln home. On a table in the library stood a number of glasses, two decanters of brandy, and under the table a basket of champagne which some of Lincoln's friends had sent over for the entertainment of the Committee.

In a few moments, Mrs. Lincoln came in, and Koerner and Peck said to her that, inasmuch as many Easterners were strong temperance people, the "treating" of the Committee might have a bad political effect. Mrs. Lincoln, however, who had a vivid recollection of the frosted mint juleps which her father had served to Henry Clay, John J. Crittenden, and other Whig leaders back in Kentucky, "remonstrated in her very lively manner." Presently Lincoln walked over from the sitting room across the hall and stood in the door listening to the argument. At last he said soothingly, "Perhaps, Mary, these gentlemen are right. After all is over we may see about it, and some may stay and have a good time."[23]

It was past seven o'clock that evening when the Committee, after an "elegant" dinner at the Chenery House, reached the Lincoln residence and were ushered into the library, which impressed one of the delegates as a "rather bare looking room." The brandy and champagne had disappeared, and a silver-plated pitcher now occupied the center of the white marble-topped table.

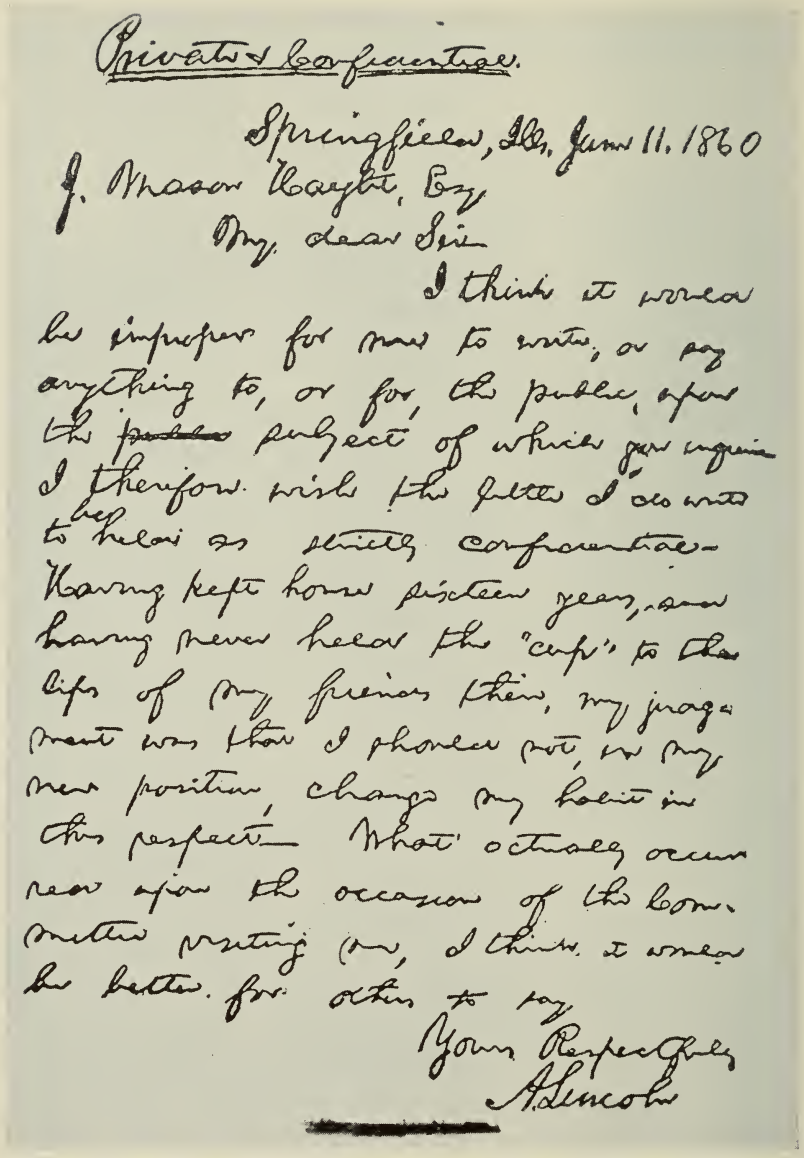
[23] Koerner, II, 93-95.

The Republican candidate, "tall and ungainly in his black suit of apparently new but ill-fitting clothes, his long tawny neck emerging gauntly from his turned-down collar, his melancholy eyes sunken deep in his haggard face," stood quietly listening, without visible embarrassment, to the dignified speech of Mr. Ashmun, the president of the convention. When Ashmun had concluded, Lincoln responded with "a few appropriate, earnest and well shaped sentences." Then followed a brief, informal conversation "in which the hearty simplicity of Lincoln's nature was shown." Ice water was graciously served, and after a round of handshaking the Committee left to accept other hospitalities where liquor and champagne flowed freely, numerous toasts were proposed, bands of music played, and fireworks were set off.[24]

A few days later, John W. Bunn met Lincoln on the street and asked him how his distinguished guests had received the cold water which he had served them at his house. "Greatly to my surprise," chuckled Lincoln, "they drank freely of it, and I never knew the reason till one of them confided that they had just come from a sumptuous dinner at the hotel where they were given bountiful quantities of everything to drink but water, so that when they reached my house they were so dry, notwithstanding the refreshments at the hotel, even water was stimulating enough to satisfy their appetites."[25]

[24] Schurz, II, 187-80; Schurz was a delegate to the Republican Convention from Wisconsin and a member of the Notification Committee.

[25] Weik, 273.



Private & Confidential.

Springfield, Ills. June 11. 1860

J. Mason Knight, Esq

My dear Sir

I think it would be improper for me to write, or say anything to, or for, the public, upon the ~~public~~ subject of which you inquire I therefore wish the letter I do write to be held as strictly confidential. Having kept home sixteen years, and having never heard the "cup" to the lips of my friends there, my judgment was that I should not, in my new position, change my habit in this respect. What I actually do in case upon the occasion of the Committee visiting me, I think it would be better for others to say.

Yours Respectfully

A. Lincoln

Lincoln's letter on reception of Notification Committee

This unorthodox reception of the Notification Committee evidently excited considerable comment, and, having received certain communications about it, Lincoln wrote the following letter, which he marked "Private & Confidential":

"Springfield, Ill.
June 11, 1860.

J. Mason Haight, Esq.

My Dear Sir:

I think it would be improper for me to write, or say anything to, or for, the public upon the subject of which you inquire. I, therefore, wish the letter I do write to be held as strictly confidential. Having kept house sixteen years, and having never held the 'cup' to the lips of my friends there, my judgment was that I should not, in my new position, change my habits in this respect. What actually occurred upon this occasion of the Committee visiting me, I think it would be better for others to say.

Yours respectfully,
A. Lincoln."[26]

Yet, it is a curious fact that the President-elect, at the time he wrote Haight, was having trouble over a hotel bill that involved items of liquor. On Sept. 17th, 1859, Lincoln had made a speech in Cincinnati, and he and Mrs. Lincoln and Tad were entertained over the week-end by the local Republican Committee at the Burnet House. When Lincoln left the hotel on Monday, he was informed by the clerk that the bill had been paid, but on June 5, 1860, he received a letter, together with a bill, from the Burnet House, saying that "We relied upon the Republican Committee, but as yet have not

[26] Hertz, 778.

been able to find any one willing to take the responsibility of paying same." The enclosed statement amounted to $53.50, which included a charge for liquor and tobacco in the sum of $7.50, and "occupancy of room No. 15. Committee, $5.00." On June 7, 1860, Lincoln wrote W. M. Dickson, of Cincinnati, sending him a copy of the Burnet House communication, stating that he had been "distinctly told the bill was settled. . . . As to wines, liquors & Cigars," said Lincoln, "we had none—absolutely none. These may have been in Room 15 by order of the Committee, but I do not recollect them at all. Please look into this and write me. I can and will pay it if it is all right, but I do not wish to be 'diddled.' "[27]

Men with whom Lincoln came in contact were not always able to appreciate his failure to indulge in the habits that gave them pleasure, and he was fond of telling a story on himself which illustrated this fact. One morning in 1849, Lincoln left Randall's Tavern in Springfield for Washington. The only other passenger in the stagecoach was a well-dressed, affable Kentuckian, who was on his way home from Missouri.

The two men immediately fell into conversation, and after a while the Kentuckian took a chew of tobacco and handed the plug to Lincoln, who politely said that he did not chew. Later on, as the clumsy vehicle jolted and swayed over the rough, dusty road and conversation lagged, the stranger pulled a leather case from his

[27] Angle, 247. Cincinnati Daily Commercial, Feb. 16, 1861. The bill was thereupon promptly paid by the Cincinnati Republicans.

pocket and offered his companion a cigar. Lincoln thanked him, but said that he never smoked.

Finally, as lunch time approached, the traveler produced a flask from his satchel. "Well, my friend," he remarked, "seeing you do not smoke or chew, perhaps you will take a little of this French brandy. 'Tis a prime article and a good appetizer besides." But Lincoln again declined this highest and best demonstration of Kentucky hospitality. In the afternoon at the junction, as the gentleman from the Bluegrass state was about to take another stage for Louisville, he shook hands cordially.

"See here," he said smilingly, "you are a clever but peculiar companion. I may never see you again, and I do not want to offend you. But I want to say this: My experience has taught me that a man who has no vices has damned few virtues. Good day."[28]

The fact that Lincoln was an exceedingly temperate man made it difficult for his friends to understand his fondness for the society of certain associates whose habits were notoriously bad. Whitney complains that Lincoln would play billiards by the hour with George Laurence, "a worthless, drunken fellow, who turned lawyer late in life."[29]

Judge David Davis, who presided over the Eighth Judicial Circuit, accounted for Lincoln's association

[28] Herndon, 302-3.

[29] Whitney, 480; Beveridge, II, 230. On May 27, 1854, Lincoln and Swett signed Laurence's law license, Angle, 129.

with a few "low and vulgar" men by the fact that "he loved sharp, witty things, loved jokes, etc.," and expressed the opinion that "Lincoln used these men merely to whistle off sadness, gloom and unhappiness."[30] But Davis was sure that Lincoln "hated drunkenness."

However, Lincoln did not allow his personal aversion to liquor nor his temperance views to interfere with the performance of professional duties. The records show that he appeared with impartial zeal as counsel for saloon keepers and for reform crusaders, who destroyed the property of saloon keepers.

In 1846, at the April term of the McLean Circuit Court, Lincoln represented Roswell Munsell, who kept bar in the Bloomington Hotel at Bloomington, Illinois, in a suit against William H. Temple over the validity of his liquor license.[31]

In 1852, he and James Haines acted as arbitrators over the ownership of five gallons of peach brandy, and the award is in Lincoln's handwriting.[32]

In 1853, Lincoln defended Patrick Sullivan, who was convicted at the October term of the Macon Circuit Court for selling liquor without a license. The fine was only $10.00, which was less than the costs of an appeal, but Lincoln took the case to the Supreme Court and strenuously, though ineffectually, contended that the existing laws of the state did not prohibit the sale of

[30] David Davis to Herndon, Sept. 19, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS.
[31] Munsell v. Temple, 8 III, 93.
[32] Photostat in Illinois State Historical Library.

intoxicants without a license. The wholesale grocers at Springfield sold large quantities of liquor to saloon keepers in Central Illinois, and were vitally interested in the outcome of this litigation. Since this action was apparently a test case, it is not improbable that Lincoln actually represented Jacob Bunn, who was one of his regular clients, his close personal friend, and a large wholesale grocer.[33]

Lincoln's participation in the Sullivan case on behalf of the liquor element is all the more interesting, because his partner, the year previous, had represented the temperance forces in an important proceeding before the Supreme Court, which had sustained the constitutionality of the liquor law passed by the Legislature in 1851. Curiously enough, the temperate Lincoln kept himself out of this case entirely, while Herndon, intemperate, but a devoted prohibitionist, appeared alone "for the people."[34]

But in May 1854, Lincoln represented nine women who were indicted for "riot" in the Dewitt Circuit Court. According to the Decatur Gazette, a man named Tanner had opened a "doggery" in the town of Marion, "much to the annoyance of the fair sex," who called upon and requested him to "desist his traffic of liquor." The request being refused, the women, "in a quiet and respectful manner, took the liquor and turned it out

[33] Sullivan v. People, 15 Ill. 233.

[34] Johnson v. The People, 14 Ill. 196. "I argued that case for the People," says Herndon. See "Letters on Temperance," by W. H. Herndon, 1855, 15. Reprint of articles published in Ill. Journal.

upon the ground." At the trial more than a hundred ladies were present to witness Lincoln's defense of the "fair daughters of Adam." The jury having imposed the insignificant fine of $2.00, the editor of the Gazette felt that Lincoln and his clients had won a victory, and exclaimed, "Huzzah for the Marion ladies!"[35]

In this same month, Frederick Pearl and Sylvester Pearl filed a suit in the Tazewell Circuit Court against Alexander Graham and twenty other men for trespass, claiming that they had entered claimants' dwelling and destroyed certain liquors and other property. The response filed by the defendants is in Lincoln's handwriting, and alleges that "the supposed dwelling house in said declaration mentioned was a common, disorderly and ill-governed house, within which, by the permission and procurement of the plaintiff, drunkenness, idleness, quarreling, profane swearing, obscenity and other offensive acts and noises were then and there practiced and encouraged, to the great injury and annoyance of the peaceful citizens of the neighborhood." A year later, May 4, 1855, the defendants were tried and fifteen of them acquitted, six were found guilty, and damages assessed at $50.00.[36]

In a similar case over in McLean County, Lincoln was not so successful. His clients, Ephriam Platt and A. B. Davidson, were fined $600.00 and costs, according to the Bloomington Pantagraph, for "destroying certain

[35] Decatur Gazette clipped in Illinois State Register, May 17, 1854.
[36] Photostatic copy of record in possession of author.

barrels of spiritual comfort" belonging to the firm of Reynolds & Fuller.[37]

On June 12, 1855, eight days after the Maine Law election, the case of George Organ and Benjamin Kessler, jointly indicted for selling liquor without a license, was called in the Sangamon Circuit Court, and the firm of Lincoln and Herndon is noted on the docket as counsel for defendants.[38]

Not only did Lincoln make no distinction among his clients with reference to temperance, but, as Dubois says, he "made no fuss" about drinking on the part of his friends and associates. "I never heard him declaim against the use of tobacco or other stimulants," declared Judge Gillispie.[39] The contemporary press shows that on many occasions he attended banquets and public dinners where an amazing number of toasts were offered, and we may be sure that they were not drunk with water.

When on July 5, 1858, the Union Fire Company, of Jacksonville, returned the friendly visit of Springfield's crack organization called The Pioneers, an elaborate luncheon was served at the St. Nicholas Hotel. Lincoln was the guest of honor, and, being called on for a toast, gallantly responded with the following:

[37] Common Law Record 6, 487, Tazewell Circuit Court; the Bloomington Pantagraph, Sept. 17, 1856.

[38] The People of Illinois v. George Organ and Benjamin Kessler, Record Book N, 518, Sangamon Circuit Court.

[39] Gillispie to Herndon, Jan. 31, 1866. Herndon-Lamon MSS.

"The Pioneer Fire Company. May they extinguish all the bad flames, but keep the flame of patriotism ever burning brightly in the hearts of the ladies."[40]

On the 25th of January, 1859, Springfield celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns with a dinner at Concert Hall, which "was well filled on this interesting occasion."

"Among the invited guests," says the reporter, "we observed the Hon. Abraham Lincoln of this city and U. F. Linder, Esq., of Coles County. The banquet was spread by Myers and embraced all that could be desired by the greatest epicure. The company sat down at nine o'clock, and after satisfying the appetite with eatables, the 'mountain dew' was brought out, and, together with a number of mysterious looking bottles, was freely circulated during the remainder of the evening. . . . The regular toasts were responded to in order by Messrs. Lincoln, Linder, Matheny, Blaisdell, and others, and the pauses were filled up with songs by Messrs. Ewing, Knox, Childs, Eastin and others, together with instrumental music by the Young American Band."[41]

It is certain that there was never any restraint because of Lincoln's presence among the jolly circuit riders who regularly gathered after supper in Judge Davis' room at the best tavern in the town where court was being held. Indeed, he was the outstanding favorite of all

[40] Illinois State Journal, July 7, 1858.
[41] Illinois State Journal, Jan. 27, 1859.

that gay, versatile group.[42] A bucket of beer stood on the hearth, a pitcher of whisky on the table, and hour after hour would swiftly pass in song and story, while Judge Davis' fat sides shook as Lincoln related a humorous anecdote in his droll inimitable way. And when Lamon got sufficiently "mellow" someone would exclaim: "Now, Hill, let's have some music," and Lincoln's Danville law partner, with his rich baritone and soft Virginia accent would sing "The Blue-Tailed Fly" or "Cousin Sally Downard," or some other ballad of equal interest but less propriety.[43]

One night at the old McCormick House in Danville, Lincoln was tried before a mock tribunal called the "Ogmathorial Court" on a charge of impoverishing the bar by his "picayune fees." He was promptly found guilty and fined one gallon of whisky, "which he paid, and then kept the crowd in high good humor until midnight with his stories."[44]

Newton says that Lincoln watched Herndon's fight against the drink habit "with never failing sympathy."[45] This is doubtless true, and certainly his loyalty toward his young, impetuous partner never wavered. On one occasion, Lincoln represented Jacob Bunn in an im-

[42] Three were later Governors of Illinois, three United States Senators, two Cabinet members, and when Lincoln became President, he appointed Davis to the Supreme Court.

[43] Weik, 217-18.

[44] "Lincoln and Lamon: Partners and Friends," by Clint Clay Tilton. Transactions Illinois State Historical Society, No. 38, 182.

[45] Newton, 18.

portant matter not strictly within the scope of legal duties, for which he declined to make any charge, saying that if he should feel at any time that he was entitled to a fee he would let his client know.

Months passed, and Bunn had almost forgotten the transaction, when Lincoln, apparently much perturbed, came to his house one morning about daybreak, and asked Bunn if he would pay him one hundred dollars as a fee in the case. Bunn very readily assented, and then Lincoln hurriedly explained that he did not want the money for himself, but that three of his friends, one of whom later proved to be Herndon, had spent the night in a drunken carousal, had almost wrecked a saloon, and that the sheriff then had them in his office and would take them to jail unless the damage was immediately paid.[46]

And yet, so very marked was Lincoln's disinclination to criticise the conduct of his friends that only once did he speak to Herndon about his habits during the sixteen years of their partnership.

It was late afternoon of Lincoln's last day in Springfield. All day crowds had filled the lobby of the Chenery House where the President-elect now received visitors. Herndon waited down the street in the frowsy old law office. Presently Lincoln came in. The lines in his rugged face were deep with care and fatigue. For a little while they discussed unfinished legal business and went hastily over the books of the firm.

[46] Weik, 203-4.

Then Lincoln threw himself down on the battered, rickety lounge, and for a few minutes lay with his face toward the ceiling, without speaking. Suddenly he blurted out: "Billy, there is one thing I have for some time wanted you to tell me, but I reckon I ought to apologize for my nerve and curiosity in asking it even now."

"What is it?" asked Herndon.

"I want you to tell me," said Lincoln, "how many times you have been drunk."

Herndon, though somewhat abashed by the bluntness of this inquiry, told him as best he could, but when he had finished, Lincoln, instead of delivering the anticipated lecture, merely said that on several occasions efforts had been secretly made to have him drop the junior partner from the firm because of his intemperate habits, but that he had always declared his intention to stand by Herndon in spite of his shortcomings.

Then, as though anxious to change the subject, Lincoln began to talk of the early days of his practice, recalling the humorous features of various law suits on the circuit. Thus his reminiscences ran on until dusk crept through the grimy little windows and it was time to go home. As he gathered a bundle of books and papers under his arm and started out, he spoke of the old sign, "Lincoln & Herndon," which hung on rusty hinges over the door at the foot of the steps.

"Let it hang there undisturbed," he said in a lowered voice. "Give our clients to understand that the election

of a President makes no change in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon. If I live, I am coming back some time, and then we will go on practicing law as if nothing had happened."

He lingered for a moment as if to take a last look at the old quarters, and then passed forever through the door into the hallway, and down the narrow stairs.[47]

[47] Weik, 299-301.

CHAPTER VIII

PRESIDENT LINCOLN

CAMPAIGN biographies of the little-known Lincoln which poured from the press following his nomination in May 1860, stressed the fact that "in private life Mr. Lincoln is a strictly moral and temperate man," and many of them went so far as to declare that "he never drank intoxicating liquors of any sort, not even a glass of wine."[1]

However, in the earlier years of the Republic total abstinence was not considered an essential nor even an important qualification for the Presidency. Washington, although a temperate man according to the standards of his time, was by no means a total abstainer. His mahogany wine chest, with its exquisite cut-glass bottles, may still be seen at Mt. Vernon.

Madeira was the wine customarily used on Washington's table, but at his Thursday dinners and on other special occasions as many as four different kinds were often served.[2]

[1] Thayer & Eldridge, 11. See also Biographies by Bartlett, Scripps and Howard.

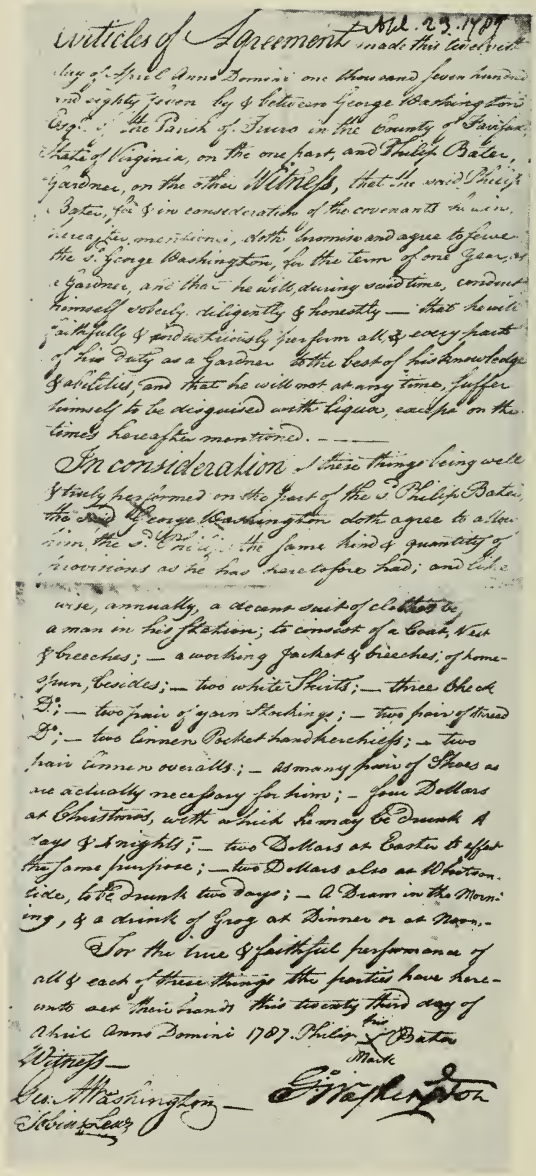
[2] "It will appear as if the household consumed enormous quantities of liquor of various sorts, but, as the temperate habits of the President and all his family are too well known for comment, the large amount of entertainment carried on in the house must be held responsible for it." Decatur, 122.

In April 1789, Washington received the French minister, Comte de Moustier, who relates that "there was a great provision of wine and punch, which the President himself offered me; but I reminded him how I had objected at Mt. Vernon to that usage."[3]

Whisky was distilled on several of his plantations, and on April 12, 1787, in a quaint and curious contract which he entered into with one Philip Bates, his gardener, Bates agrees, for a term of one year, to "conduct himself soberly, diligently & honestly," and that "he will not at any time suffer himself to be disguised with liquor except on the times hereinafter mentioned." Washington then agrees to provide Bates with various articles of wearing apparel and "four Dollars at Christmas, with which he may be drunk 4 days & 4 nights; two Dollars at Easter to effect the same purpose; two dollars also at Whitson tide, to be drunk two days; a Dram in the morning, & a drink of Grog at dinner or at noon."[4]

Thomas Jefferson entertained lavishly at the White House during his two terms, and his wine bill amounted to the sum of $10,855.90. Madeira was Jefferson's favorite beverage, but he also bought other fine wines in large quantities. His purchases for 1803 included five hundred bottles of Champagne; two half pipes of wine of O Eyras from Lisbon; two pipes of Brazil Madeira, two

[3] Decatur, 4.
[4] Original in Library of Congress.



Articles of Agreement Feb. 23. 1787
made this twenty-third day of April Anno Domini one thousand seven hundred and eighty seven by & between George Washington Esq. of the Parish of Truro in the County of Fairfax, State of Virginia, on the one part, and Philip Bater, Gardener, on the other part, Witness, that the said Philip Bater, for & in consideration of the covenants herein hereafter mentioned, doth covenant and agree to serve the said George Washington, for the term of one year as a Gardner, and that he will during said time, conduct himself soberly, diligently & honestly — that he will faithfully & industriously perform all & every part of his Duty as a Gardner to the best of his knowledge & abilities, and that he will not at any time, suffer himself to be disguised with liquor, except on the times hereafter mentioned. — —

In consideration of these things being well & truly performed on the part of the said Philip Bater, the said George Washington doth agree to allow him the said Philip the same kind & quantity of provisions as he has therefore had; and like-

wise, annually, a decent suit of clothes, viz a man in his station; to consist of a Coat, Vest & breeches; — a working Jacket & breeches; of home-spun, besides; — two white Shirts; — three check Do; — two pair of yarn Stockings; — two pair of thread Do; — two linnen Pocket handkerchiefs; — two pair linnen overalls; — as many pairs of Shoes as are actually necessary for him; — four Dollars at Christmas, with which he may be drunk 4 days & 4 nights; — two Dollars at Easter to effect the same purpose; — two Dollars also at Whitsuntide, to be drunk two days; — A Dram in the Morning, & a drink of Grog at Dinner or at Noon.

For the true & faithful performance of all & each of these things the parties have hereunto set their hands this twenty third day of April Anno Domini 1787. Philip his Bater Mark

Witness —
Lu. Washington —
Tobias Lear

Washington's contract with his gardener

hundred and ninety-four bottles of Chambertin Burgundy; fifty bottles of White Hermitage; one hundred and fifty bottles of Rozan Morgan, and one quarter cask Mountain, crop of 1747.

In 1804, the President's guests were entertained with the best brands of Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, Hungarian and French vintages.[5]

A dinner guest at the White House during Madison's term observed that "there were many French dishes and exquisite wines, I presume, by the praises bestowed on them; but I have been so little accustomed to drink that I could not discern the difference between Sherry and rare old Burgundy Madeira. Comment on the quality of the wine seems to form the chief topic after the removal of the cloth."[6]

When James Fenimore Cooper attended a White House dinner, while James Monroe was President, he relates that at the end of the dessert, Mrs. Monroe "withdrew, attended by two or three of the most gallant of the company," and that "no sooner was his wife's back turned than the President reseated himself, inviting his guests to imitate the action," and that the men did not rejoin the ladies until after the guests had been allowed "sufficient time to renew, in a few glasses, the recollections of similar enjoyments."[7]

During the Administration of John Quincy Adams, Esther Singleton notes that on one occasion he received a committee of mail contractors who were introduced

[5] Singleton, I, 42-43. [6] Ibid, 62. [7] Singleton, I, 145.

by Henry Clay, Secretary of State; that cakes and wine were served, and that the President "drank success to them all through highways and byways."[8]

The dinners of Martin Van Buren were famous for the wide variety of excellent food served. "Champaign, without ice, was sparingly supplied in long slender glasses, but there was no lack of sound claret, and with the dessert several bottles of old Madeira was generally produced by the host who succinctly gave the age and history of each."[9] The finest Madeira bore the name of "The Supreme Court," being the favorite beverage of the members of that body who made direct importations every year and sipped it complacently as they consulted over their cases in council chambers.

When John Tyler brought his bride to the White House, "a most magnificent Bride's cake and sparkling Champaign awaited the welcoming guests, and the distinctions of party and of opinion were all forgotten, and kind feelings and generous impulses seemed to gladden the hearts of all."[10]

It will be also remembered that hard cider was the beverage of the Harrison campaign. Zachary Taylor, however, was reported to be a total abstainer, but when prohibitionists emphasized this fact, it was pointed out that drinking too freely of ice water had killed him.

There can be no doubt but that liquor drinking was very widely prevalent among all classes in the national capital during the first half of the nineteenth century,

[8] Singleton, I, 169. [9] Poore, I, 222. [10] Singleton, I, 292.

and this was particularly true in official society. Ladies and gentlemen were fascinated by the brilliance of Mr. Clay's conversation, especially after a few glasses of Madeira or Champagne, and they were vastly amused by the picturesque escapades of Kentucky's gifted inebriate, Tom Marshall.

When Jennie Lind gave her first concert in Washington, and the end of her first song was greeted with tumultuous applause, Mr. Webster, who had been dining out that evening, rose with pompous dignity and made an imposing bow, which was most heartily enjoyed by the audience.[11]

On another occasion, Mr. Webster was called upon for an impromptu after-dinner speech and being very much in his "cups," had to be prompted by a friend who sat just behind him. The prompter suggested, "The tariff." Webster resolutely braced himself against the edge of the table. "The tariff, gentlemen," he declared, "is a subject requiring the profound attention of the statesmen." Here the Senator paused and nodded a little, and his friend whispered, "The national debt." Recovering himself, Webster continued, "And, gentlemen, there is the national debt—it should be paid; yes, gentlemen, it should be paid." Then, stimulated by the loud cheers, he announced, "I will be hanged if it sha'n't be!" And taking out his pocketbook, "I will pay it myself! How much is it?" Considering Webster's well-

[11] Poore, I, 388.

known financial condition, this incident excited the mirth of Washingtonians wherever it was related.[12]

Except for one brief term which the Springfield lawyer had spent in Congress,[13] the Lincolns knew little about Washington, and nothing whatever of the social life of the capital. For generations the Southerners, with their gracious hospitality, had dominated Washington aristocracy. And in this circle Mrs. Lincoln, with her Kentucky background, would have been quite at home. But in 1861, low-hanging war clouds had changed everything. The shutters of many fine old houses in the exclusive residential sections were closed; their owners had gone south to cast their fortunes with the young, eager, chivalrous Confederacy. Others of like sympathies held aloof from the court of the "Black Republican queen." Still, there were a few places where the broken ranks of the social élite gathered before blazing wood fires and played euchre until midnight, when a bountiful supper of cold duck, venison pie and broiled oysters was served, with iced Champagne or Burgundy at blood heat.

Mrs. John J. Crittenden, the beautiful wife of the venerable Kentucky Senator, Mrs. Myra Gaines, widow of the Virginia general, both Southerners, and Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas and Kate Chase, daughter of the

[12] Poore, I, 288.

[13] The Lincolns then lived at Widow Sprigg's boarding-house on Capitol Hill, and the "lone Whig" from Illinois spent "most of his leisure hours at a nearby bowling alley," where he "played the game with great zest and spirit," accepting "success and defeat with like good nature and humor." Busey, 27.

Secretary of the Treasury, were practically all that remained of the old "official set." But in spite of obvious difficulties, Mrs. Lincoln bravely attempted to carry on the usual White House functions—small state dinners, receptions and levees—until the death of Willie Lincoln in 1862 cast a permanent shadow over the Executive Mansion.

Liquor, notwithstanding the denial of some biographers, was undoubtedly served at state dinners during the Lincoln Administration, as shown by the following telegrams which have survived the vicissitudes of the War Department files:

"February 1, '64.

Clement Heerdt & Co.
No. 93 Water St.,
New York.

If you have not disposed of the box of Madeira, of similar quality to the one sent us a few weeks since, please forward it immediately. Mrs. Lincoln."

Clement Heerdt & Co. "February 25, '64.
93 Water St.,
New York.

Please send immediately one basket Champagne, the Widow Cliquot brand. Mrs. Lincoln."

Clement Heerdt & Co. "February 26, '64.
93 Water St.,
New York.

A telegram was sent you in reference to a basket of Champagne. Please send a basket of the kind requested, also another one of the choicest quality you have in store.

Mrs. Lincoln."

"February 13, 1865.

C. Heerdt & Co.
93 Water St.,
New York.

Send by express one (1) case Veuve Cliquot Champagne, same price and quality as before.

Mrs. A. Lincoln."[14]

On February 5, 1862, an elaborate state reception was held at the White House. The President and his wife received in the East Room. Mrs. Lincoln was attractively attired in a white satin dress, cut décolleté and trimmed with black lace flounces which were looped up with knots of ribbon, and she wore a head-dress of flowers. The Green, Red and Blue Rooms of the White House were thrown open, and were decorated with rare flowers, and the Marine Band played entrancing music in the corridor. Robert Lincoln, the eldest son whom the humorists of that day had nicknamed "The Prince of Rails," assisted in receiving. The brilliant company included members of the diplomatic corps, with their wives and daughters, senators, justices of the Supreme Court, cabinet officials, and two French princes, the Comte de Paris and the Duc de Chartres.[15]

Senator Browning, who was present, referred to the event as "a very large and very brilliant one."[16] But the affair seems to have brought great censure upon both the President and Mrs. Lincoln. In spite of the fact that

[14] Hertz, I, 271.
[15] Poore, II, 115-120.
[16] Browning, I, 529.

there was no dancing, a Philadelphia rhymester wrote a scurrilous poem entitled "The Queen Must Dance."

The American Temperance Journal deplored at great length "the famous fête at the White House," and referred to Mrs. Lincoln's table, "spread with all that can intoxicate and cheer," and continued, "with regard to the President, we had at his election, and have to this day, good reason to suppose that he was and is in principle and practice a decided temperance man. We never endorsed for his better half, but . . . we supposed that all was right in the family.[17]

In spite of Lincoln's well known and long standing reputation as a man of temperate habits, rumors of his excessive personal use of liquor were quite current below the Mason & Dixon Line. Newspaper dispatches reported on the authority of passengers arriving from the "extreme south" that the people "universally believe that Lincoln has been drunk ever since his inauguration, and only goes out at night disguised to escape assassination."[18]

But the evidence is clear and unmistakable that except for mere gestures at wine drinking on state occasions, Lincoln was a total abstainer in the White House.

John G. Nicolay, one of his secretaries, says that "he never drank," adding, however, "the only qualification that could possibly be made on this last point is that he did sometimes at his own table, and especially

[17] Journal of the American Temperance Union, Vol. 25, March 1862, 40.
[18] Cincinnati Daily Commercial, Apr. 30, 1861.

at state dinners, sip a little wine; but even then, in a perfunctory way, in complying with a social custom and not as doing it from any desire or initiative or habit of his own."[19]

James Grant Wilson, who saw Lincoln frequently during the last six years of his life, writes: "I never saw him smoke or use tobacco in any form, and but a few times observed him drinking a glass of wine."[20]

"He drank little or no wine," says John Hay. "He never cared for wine or liquors of any sort."[21]

So definitely was this fact known that the Copperhead "Life of Lincoln," extensively circulated in 1864, entitled "Only Authentic Life of Abraham Lincoln, Alias 'Old Abe,' " said: "In his habits he is by no means foppish, though he brushes his hair sometimes and is said to wash. He swears fluently. A strict temperance man himself, he does not object to another man's being pretty drunk, especially when he is about to make a bargain with him. . . . He can hardly be called handsome, though he is certainly much better looking since he had the smallpox."[22]

John Hay's Diary, however, indicates that the President's gay, rollicking young assistant secretary, and even the older and more staid Nicolay, were by no means so abstemious as their chief.

[19] J. G. Nicolay to J. G. Wilson, Apr. 7, 1900. Putnam's Magazine, Feb. 1909.

[20] Putnam's Magazine, February 1909.

[21] "Life in the White House," by John Hay. Century Magazine, November 1890.

[22] "Only Authentic Life of Abraham Lincoln, Alias 'Old Abe,' " 14-15.

On the afternoon of November 18, 1863, Lincoln and his party went down to Gettysburg for the dedication of the National Cemetery to be held next day. Arriving at dusk, the President was taken to the home of one of the leading citizens, Judge Wills. Gettysburg was celebrating its greatest evening. The hotel, boarding houses and private residences were filled with convivial strangers. Crowds thronged the village streets and marched boisterously from place to place as the blaring military bands serenaded various distinguished guests.

Young Hay and several associates "foraged around," ate a "chafing dish of oysters," and then went to the lodging of John W. Forney, a noted newspaper man, "and drank a little whiskey with him. He had been drinking a good deal during the day and was getting to feel a little ugly and dangerous. . . . We went out after a while, following the music, to hear the serenades. . . . We went back to Forney's room, having picked up Nicolay, and drank more whiskey. Nicolay sang his little song of the 'Three Thieves.' " Finally it was proposed that Forney deliver an address. Somebody went out to get a band. Forney then made a ludicrous, tipsy speech, amidst lusty cheers of the crowd, after which, as Hay says, "we sang 'John Brown' and went home."[23]

The records contain numerous references to very heavy liquor drinking on the part of many of the mem-

[23] Hay Diary entry, Nov. 18, 1863, Thayer, Vol. I, 204-6. On Jan. 27, 1864, enroute to Florida, Hay refers to having "brought my books and my whiskey," and on Feb. 1st, "We went upstairs and drank a few whiskey punches."

bers of Congress, particularly during the early part of Lincoln's Administration. On August 5, 1861, an entry in Senator Browning's Diary recites: "Several of the Senators were quite drunk today, especially McDougall of California & Saulsbury of Delaware, and some scenes were enacted which ought not to occur in a body occupying so exalted & Dignified a position as the Senate of the United States."[24]

And on January 27, 1863, Saulsbury, in a bitter tirade against the Administration, referred to "Mr. Lincoln—a weak and imbecile man; the weakest man that I ever knew in a high place; for I have seen him and conversed with him, and I say here in my place in the Senate of the United States, that I never did see or converse with so weak and imbecile a man as Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States."

At this point the Vice-President ruled Saulsbury out of order, but he appealed from the decision of the chair, and, in his remarks in support of the appeal, continued: "Talk not to me about *lettres de cachet;* talk not to me about the espionage of Napoleon; they are all buried beneath the wave of oblivion in comparison to what this man of yesterday, this Abraham Lincoln that neither you nor I ever heard of four years ago, has chosen to exercise. Sir, it is out of order, I am told, so to characterize the act of an administration; but if I wanted to paint a tyrant; if I wanted to paint a despot, a man perfectly regardless of every constitutional right of the

[24] Browning, I, 493.

people, whose sworn servant, not ruler, he is, I would paint the hideous form of Abraham Lincoln. If that be treason—"[25]

Here Senator Browning says that the Senator from Delaware "was again required to take his seat, which he refused to do, and became very turbulent. He was ordered into the custody of the Sergeant of Arms, and, other Senators informed me, drew a pistol. I did not see the pistol, but heard him threaten to shoot, and have no doubt he had one. He was very drunk. The Sergeant at Arms took him into custody and the business proceeded. He ought to be expelled, and I presume will be."[26]

However, no further action seems to have been taken against Senator Saulsbury until after the occurrence of a most embarrassing incident which set the tongues of Washingtonians and of the whole country wagging for many weeks.

On the morning of March 4, 1865, Andrew Johnson was sworn in as Vice-President of the United States before a brilliant assemblage that crowded the Senate chamber. Johnson, still weak from an attack of typhoid fever, had taken one or perhaps two glasses of brandy just before the ceremonies began, and, when the time arrived for him to make his speech, was roaring drunk. Wholly unprepared for such conduct on the part of the Senate's presiding officer, the distinguished audience sat in bewildered silence while the tipsy Tennessean

[25] Cong. Globe, 3rd Sess. 37th Cong. Pt. 1, 548-550.
[26] Browning, I, 620.

bellowed and gesticulated in a wild harangue. After admonishing the Senators and the members of the Supreme Court that they were, after all, merely "creatures of the American people," who "stood above them," he turned to the gallery, where the foreign representatives sat in their gorgeous uniforms, and disdainfully exclaimed: "And you, gentlemen of the diplomatic corps, with all your fine feathers and gewgaws!"[27]

"During the painful ordeal," says Senator John B. Henderson of Missouri, "Mr. Lincoln's head drooped in the deepest humiliation." And when at last Johnson's speech was over and Lincoln started to the steps of the Capitol for his own inauguration, he turned to the marshal and said, quietly but apprehensively, "Do not let Johnson speak outside."[28]

At the east portico, Chief Justice Chase presented to Lincoln a large, Morocco-bound Bible upon which to take the oath of office, and the book is said to have been open significantly at the passage in Isaiah: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink."[29]

That night, Secretary Welles noted in his diary that the conduct of the Vice-President "was all in very bad taste."[30] And the other members of the Cabinet made sharp comment.

Senator Browning appraised the incident as "a very disreputable inaugural. He addressed himself to the Cab-

[27] Milton, 146. [28] Century Magazine, Dec. 1912.
[29] Milton, 148. [30] Welles, II, 252.

inet officers by name, and boasted of his plebeian origin, and disgusted all decent people who heard him."[31]

The American Temperance Journal, under large headlines: "Astounding Event; Intemperance Near the Throne!!," said, "Andrew Johnson, the noble loyalist, the hero of Tennessee, the man elected to fill the second office of the people, and in case of death, the first . . . appears as the silly and almost idiotic drunkard, to the mortification and sadness of all who, in confidence of his high character and remembrance of his high deeds, had elevated him to this exalted place."[32]

Shocked and penitent, the Senate, on Monday, March 6th, passed a resolution directing the Sergeant at Arms to "remove forthwith" all "intoxicating liquor" from the Senate wing of the capitol and "hereafter to exclude liquor in every form." Then it voted to remove Senators McDougall and Saulsbury from all standing committees "because of their habitual inebriety and incapacity for business."

But Lincoln, with a wider and more varied experience than most of his colleagues, took a philosophical view of the matter. "I have known Andy for many years," he said. "He made a bad slip the other day, but you need not be scared. Andy ain't a drunkard."[33]

It is certain that one of Lincoln's greatest problems during the war was the excessive use of liquor in the

[31] Browning, II, 9.
[32] Journal of the American Temperance Union, Vol. 29, Apr. 1865, 57.
[33] Milton, 149.

army. Not only was this true when the soldiers were encamped around Washington, where there were six hundred licensed saloons and fifteen hundred unlicensed rum shops, but in the field as well.

On September 29, 1863, a delegation of the Sons of Temperance waited upon the President, and Lincoln made them a brief address.

"When I was a young man—long ago—before the Sons of Temperance as an organization had any existence," said he, "I, in an humble way, made temperance speeches, and I think I may say that to this day I have never, by my example, belied what I then said."

To the delegation's suggestion for the purpose of advancing the cause of temperance in the army, Lincoln said: "I can not make particular responses to them at this time." He pointed out that the prevention of intemperance in the army was part of the articles of war, and that the law required the dismissal of officers for drunkenness. "I am not sure that, consistent with the public service, more can be done than has been done."

Then he continued, "I think that the reasonable men of the war have long since agreed that intemperance is one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, of all evils among mankind. This is not a matter of dispute, I believe. . . . The mode of cure is one about which there may be differences of opinion."

To the suggestion that drunkenness in the army was the cause of frequent disaster to the Union arms, Lincoln replied that "while it is perhaps rather a bad source to

derive comfort from, nevertheless in a hard struggle, I do not know but what it is some consolation that there is some intemperance on the other side, too; and that they have no right to beat us in physical combat on that ground."[34]

And to another temperance committee, who emphatically told Lincoln that his troops could not win because the army drank so much whisky as to bring the curse of the Lord upon them, the President mildly observed that he could not see the justice of this curse, since "the other side drinks more and worse whiskey than ours do."[35]

The American Temperance Journal, however, was apparently not altogether satisfied with Lincoln's reply to the Sons of Temperance. "The President said he was not sure that more could be done than has been done," stated the Journal. "Is he sure that in consistency with the public service some things could not have been left undone which have been done? For instance, the issuing of the order of General Banks permitting liquor to be carried over the lines for the use of the officers in their

[34] Works, IX, 144.

[35] Herndon, III, 516. The accuracy of Lincoln's observation is indicated by a rare Confederate temperance tract, published in Richmond "By a Physician," owned by the author, which reads in part: "Officers and privates—church members and worldlings, gather around the festive board and spend the hours and days in drinking, gambling and too often, alas! in obscene and profane jocularity. The man who raises his stalwart arm to break the shackles which an earthly despot would impose upon this sunny South, now bows at the shrine of Bacchus. . . . Better had we bowed the neck to Lincoln's yolk than made ourselves the willing slaves of grovelling passions and depraved appetites."

tents, while it was refused to the private soldiers; an order which has converted every officer's tent into a drinking saloon and caused more drunkenness in the army than anything else whatever."[36]

In January 1863, Lincoln found it necessary to appoint a new commander for the Army of the Potomac to succeed Burnside. General Joseph Hooker seemed to be the most available man. "Fighting Joe," a very impressive looking officer, had captivated John Hay by his "tall and statuesque form, grand fighting head and grizzled russet hair, red florid cheeks and bright blue eyes." It was rumored, however, that Hooker was very fond of liquor. Montgomery Blair considered him "too great a friend of John Barleycorn," and Gideon Welles was afraid that he indulged in "the free use of whiskey."[37]

Even Hay, who dined with him occasionally, noticed that while Hooker did not drink much, "yet what little he did drink made his cheeks hot and red and his eyes brighter," and Hay observed, "I can easily understand how the stories of his drunkenness have grown, if so little affects him as I have seen."[38]

Lincoln himself was not wholly without doubt about Hooker, but he had an engaging frankness and a keen intelligence that the President admired. Hooker was personally popular with the army, and, as his sobriquet indicated, was not afraid of combat. So, on January

[36] Journal of the American Temperance Union, Vol. 36, Nov. 1863, 168.
[37] Welles, I, 229-30.
[38] Hay Diary, I, 93-99.



Union field officers indulging in social glass

26, 1863, the President placed him in command, with a now celebrated letter of friendly warning.

All went well until the afternoon of May 2nd, when the veteran infantry of Stonewall Jackson burst like a thundercloud upon Hooker's right flank lying unprotected in the woods at Chancellorsville. In the fighting that followed, the Union troops were completely routed, and Hooker himself was stunned for several hours when a cannonball shot away a wooden pillar of the portico of the Chancellor House, near where he was standing.

Following this battle, it was bitterly charged that Hooker had been intoxicated, but General Schurz, who was in immediate command of the right flank, seems to be under the impression that Hooker's "torpid condition" was due to the fact that he had "utterly abstained from his usual potations for fear of taking too much," and that "his brain failed to work because he had not given it the stimulus to which it had been habituated."[39]

When Lincoln appointed Grant to command the armies of the United States with rank of lieutenant general, many of his friends and advisors doubted the wisdom of his choice.[40]

As a young officer with the army in Mexico, Grant had been a "solitary drinker," and it was said that he had been removed from the army before the Civil War on account of his bibulous habits. After Shiloh, where it

[39] Schurz, II, 431.

[40] "He had also, like Hooker, the reputation of indulging too freely in whiskey to be always safe and reliable." Welles, I, 387.

was claimed that he had almost lost the battle through dissipation, Lincoln was strongly urged to remove him, but the President, sitting in deep meditation before an open fire in the Cabinet Room, his long legs propped up on the high marble mantle, slowly shook his head. "I can't spare this man," he said. "He fights."[41]

Later the now famous story became current that, when a committee appeared at the White House seeking Grant's retirement on the ground that "he drinks too much whiskey," Lincoln smiled and said: "By the way, gentlemen, can either of you tell me where General Grant procures his whiskey? If I can find out, I will send every general in the field a barrel of it."[42]

David Homer Bates, in his "Lincoln Stories," published in 1926, challenges the authenticity of this anecdote, saying that Lincoln denied it in his presence when he was a young telegraph operator in the War Department.[43]

But Bates would be more convincing were he not so evidently anxious that Lincoln should appear under all circumstances as perfect in thought and action as possible; for instance: " 'By jinks,' Lincoln exclaimed one day, under pressure, in the telegraph office. Almost instantly he looked self-accused and apologetic. To the suggestion that 'by jinks' was not swearing, he replied

[41] McClure, 178-80.

[42] Carpenter, 247. Carpenter spent six months in the White House shortly after this incident is alleged to have occurred.

[43] Bates, 50.

that according to what his mother told him when a child, it was *swearing* and wrong."[44]

Now, in the quaint verbiage of old Aunt Tish, who was being vexatiously cross-examined in a rural Kentucky court, "Enough is enough and too much spiles it." Certainly Lincoln was not a profane man. In fact, he rarely ever swore. But at the same time he was no squeamish, mealy-mouthed individual who went about quaking in his boots lest, in an unguarded moment, some robust or impious word escape him.

"Ewing won't do anything. He is not worth a damn," Lincoln wrote his law partner, John T. Stuart.[45]

And a few months later: "A damned hawk-billed Yankee is here besetting me at every turn I take."[46]

"Then, in God's name, cut it down clean to the roots," he exclaimed, when upon arriving home one afternoon he found a man chopping down, by order of Mrs. Lincoln, the only shade tree in his front yard.[47]

"By God, Governor, I will make the ground in this country too hot for the foot of a slave," he declared when the chief executive of Illinois declined to interfere in the case of a free negro boy from Springfield who had been taken off a boat in the Mississippi River and sold into bondage.[48]

[44] Bates, "Lincoln Stories," 7-8.
[45] Works, IX, 98. For a fac simile of this letter see A. C. Goodyear Sale Catalog, Feb. 1, 1927.
[46] Works, I, 139.
[47] Statement, P. P. Enos, 1866, in Beveridge, II, 205.
[48] Herndon, II, 379

And young John Hay one night recorded in his diary a conversation with the President that day in which Lincoln had said: "For once in my life, I rather gave my temper the rein, and I talked to those men pretty damned plainly."[49]

Of course, Lincoln could not swear with the crashing vehemence of Washington, or the lurid imagery of Andrew Jackson, or the tripping rhythmic eloquence of Kentucky's gallant Harry of the West, but it is apparent that, now and then, under sufficient provocation, he could do rather well in his own awkward way.

Furthermore, at least on one occasion, he did not seem greatly shocked at the use of profanity in his presence. One day the President and Secretary of State Seward, with a young staff officer, were riding in an army ambulance driven by four mules. The party was going down to a military review near Arlington, and when they reached the Virginia side of the Potomac, the roads—rough and rutted from artillery and army trains —became very bad. Finally the driver lost his temper and began swearing. After a while the President turned around and said:

"Driver, my friend, are you an Episcopalian?"

Much astonished, the man replied: "No, Mr. President, I ain't much of anything, but if I go to church at all I go to the Methodist Church."

"Oh, excuse me," replied Lincoln, with a smile and a twinkle in his eye, "I thought you must be an Episco-

[49] Diary entry, Oct. 30, 1863, Thayer, I, 203.

palian, for you swear just like Secretary Seward, and he is a church warden."[50]

The "Grant Whiskey" story deserves only passing notice. If related by Lincoln at all, it was so obviously in jest that the persistent attack upon it by the Prohibitionists is somewhat surprising. At the very time that this story first became current, Lincoln was lending every possible aid to James B. Merwin and other temperance agents in their work among the soldiers of the Union Army.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Merwin was an agent of the Michigan State Temperance Alliance, with headquarters in Detroit. In July 1861, he arrived in Washington. Fifty-four years later, it was his recollection that he came at the urgent personal solicitation of President Lincoln.[51]

But the report of the Committee on Military Affairs filed in 1862, with reference to "the memorial of Rev. J. B. Merwin . . . asking compensation as chaplain," recites that "It is claimed by Mr. Merwin, and your Committee believes truly, that upon the suggestion of the Hon. Lewis Cass and Governor Blair, of Michigan, Mr. Merwin came to Washington on the 8th of July last with a petition addressed to the President and Secretary of War, asking that he should be assigned to some position in the army which would give him facilities for

[50] Putnam's Magazine, Feb. 1909.

[51] "Lincoln wrote me to come to Washington." See full statement "Proceedings 16th National Anti-Saloon League of America," 267-269.

visiting the various camps and regiments, and for the purpose of addressing the officers and soldiers on the subject of temperance."[52]

Although there is no evidence to support Merwin's oft-repeated assertion of intimacy with Lincoln during the war period, it is no doubt a fact that he performed valuable services as a faithful temperance worker in the army camps.[53]

Soon after Merwin's arrival in Washington, a memorial was presented to Lincoln, signed by many influential members of Congress, asking that Merwin be commissioned a major of volunteers, which the President somewhat cautiously endorsed on the back as follows: "If it be ascertained at the War Department that the President has legal authority to make an appointment such as is asked within, and General Scott is of the opinion it will be available for good, let it be done."[54]

But a year later, the highly salutary effects of Merwin's work had been so thoroughly established that Lincoln did not hesitate to write the following:

[52] House Report No. 110. House Bill No. 484 was reported May 16, 1862, but seems to have been killed by Senator Conkling of New York, June 13, 1862. See House Journal, 37th Congress, Second Sess. 702; Cong. Globe, 37th Cong., Second Sess., Vol. 32, pt. 3, 2716.

[53] Brigadier General Richardson informed the Committee on Military Affairs: "His visit and address to the regiments in this brigade under my command has been productive of very great good; the men listened with the deepest interest. There is a marked improvement in their behavior and appearance. Seven hundred and forty in one regiment have taken the temperance pledge." House Report No. 110, Ibid.

[54] Lincoln to War Department, July 17, 1861. Facsimile in White, opp. 90.

"Surgeon General will send Mr. Merwin wherever he may think the public service may require.

July 24, 1862.

A. Lincoln."[55]

On June 16, 1904, "The New Voice," a prohibition periodical, published an interview with Merwin, stating that Lincoln had "called Mr. Merwin to the White House that fateful Friday, the 14th of April 1865, with reference to a plan to excavate the Panama Canal with freedmen labor," and that during this conversation Lincoln had said, "Mr. Merwin, after reconstruction, the next great question will be the overthrow of the liquor traffic."

During the next six years, this incident underwent a drastic evolution, and on July 5, 1910, Merwin wrote Dr. Blakeslee that General Ben Butler had suggested to Lincoln the Panama Canal plan, and that the President wanted Merwin to confer with Horace Greeley about it. "He telegraphed General Dix to send me to Washington by first train," said Merwin. "I left New York Tuesday night, reached Washington Wednesday morning. A great crowd of people were around the White House. I held the telegram up. President Lincoln saw it; said 'Come at ten tonight.' It was twelve at night before he could get away and lock up. We worked until three a. m. and then retired. Thursday night we worked on the proposition until three a. m., and still it did not quite suit Mr. Lincoln. Friday was Cabinet meeting. He

[55] Facsimile in White, opp. 88.

locked all the doors at its close, and ordered our dinner brought up. He finished the paper. We ate dinner and he read it over. One door was not locked. Mrs. Lincoln came in and said, 'Abe, the Ford's Theater people have tendered us a box for this evening, and I have accepted. The Grants are going with us, and I do not want you to make any other engagement.'

"Mr. Lincoln said: 'Mary, I do not think we ought to go to the theater. Do you remember it is Good Friday, a religious day with a great many people, and I do not think we ought to go the the theater tonight.'

"Mrs. Lincoln said: 'We are going.'

"We finished dinner. He read the paper over again. He folded it carefully and handed it to me saying, 'Merwin, we have cleaned up a colossal job. We have abolished slavery. After reconstruction, the next great movement on the part of the people will be the overthrow of the legalized liquor traffic, and you know my heart and my hand, my purse and my life will be given to that great movement.'

" 'Mr. Lincoln, shall I make this public?' asked I.

"He said 'Yes, publish it as broad as the daylight.' "[56]

Yet Merwin, the lifelong prohibitionist, the professional temperance lecturer, the militant, implacable foe of strong drink, waited almost forty years before he obeyed Lincoln's parting injunction to publish his momentous declaration as "broad as the daylight," and

[56] White, 153

more than forty-five years elapsed before he disclosed the full details of this last and most important interview.

Under the circumstances, even the most credulous of Merwin's followers can hardly object to the close scrutiny of this startling, if somewhat tardy, disclosure.

In 1892, General Benjamin F. Butler wrote a bulky volume entitled "Butler's Book," which, as we may fairly infer, Merwin had at least casually read. Butler says that just before Lincoln left for City Point to visit Grant's army, he suggested to him that the negro soldiers then enlisted in the Union ranks be employed after the cessation of hostilities in digging "a short canal across the Isthmus of Darien."

Lincoln replied: "There is meat in that, General Butler. There is meat in that," and he requested Butler to consult Secretary Seward as to how the project might affect our foreign relations, saying, however, "there is no special hurry."[57]

A short time after this interview, Lincoln arrived, on March 23, 1865, at City Point, where he remained with Grant until after the fall of Richmond, and Butler never saw him again. That day Secretary Welles recorded in his diary, "the President has gone to the front, partly to get rid of the throng that is pressing upon him. . . . He makes his office much more laborious than he should. . . . The more he yields, the greater the pressure upon him. It has now become such that he is compelled to flee. There is no doubt he is much worn down."[58]

[57] Butler, 902-908. [58] Welles, March 23, 1865, II, 264.

On Sunday evening, April 9th, the President returned to Washington. Lee had surrendered. The North was frantic with joy. The capital was in a state of delirious confusion; thousands of marchers crowded the streets amidst brilliant illumination and fireworks, serenading the President and demanding speeches. The corridors of the White House were packed and jammed with the "throng" that was "pressing about him."

And yet Lincoln, according to Merwin, though weighted down with important matters which had accumulated during the long absence from his office, confronted with a multitude of perplexing problems suddenly arising out of the end of the war, in the very vortex of all this swirling excitement, worked with him until three o'clock Thursday morning, and until the same hour Friday morning, and then through the dinner hour that day, on a paper concerning the canal plan which Merwin was to carry to Horace Greeley.

Why all this writing? The plan, it must be remembered, was not Lincoln's. It was Butler's; and Lincoln was as yet wholly unacquainted with the details. Butler says that he had promised the President to "elaborate my proposition carefully in writing before I presented it to Mr. Seward," but he had not done so, and Lincoln had said there was "no special hurry." It is inconceivable, therefore, that Lincoln would have written at such extraordinary length to a crusty, peevish, fault-finding newspaper man like Greeley concerning a project upon which he could only have been meagerly informed.

Furthermore, Merwin's account of this last interview with Lincoln is improbable on its face. The Cabinet meeting did not adjourn before one-thirty. Grant was present at this conference, and the General was still in the White House, according to Merwin, when he and Lincoln dined alone.[59]

But what became of Grant? He could scarcely have been entertained by Mrs. Lincoln, because she "could not tolerate" him,[60] and he did not like her.[61] Strange, indeed, that the President should leave the commanding general of his victorious armies, lock the door, and have luncheon with Merwin!

However, one door was unlocked. This, of course, has to be, for Merwin is about to introduce Mrs. Lincoln in a bit of highly inconsistent dialogue. He says she called the President "Abe," but no one else, not even her relatives and members of her household, ever heard her refer to him except as "Mr. Lincoln."[62]

Mrs. Lincoln would hardly have informed the President that the theater box had been tendered that evening, because the invitation had been extended to Lincoln himself, and it had been accepted at least three hours before Mrs. Lincoln's supposed conversation.[63] It

[59] Letter to the author from J. W. Starr, quoting Merwin, May 23, 1932.
[60] Keckley, 133-134. [61] Badeau, 356, et seq.
[62] Keckley, 125-129. "Mary never called her husband by his first name," Mrs. Lincoln's sister, in Helm, 106. "I often laugh and tell Mr. Lincoln that I am determined my next husband shall be rich. . . . " "Mr. Lincoln is not at home." Mary Lincoln to her sister, Emilie, Sept. 20 (1856). Helm, 122-124.
[63] Testimony of James R. Ford, Manager of Ford's Theater, May 30, 1865. Pitman, 101.

is not likely that she would have told him that the Grants were going, because Lincoln had known this even before the Cabinet meeting,[64] and had also known by eleven o'clock that the Grants had cancelled their engagement,[65] and Mrs. Lincoln had invited Major Rathbone and Miss Harris in their stead.

It is also strange that Lincoln should have expressed an unwillingness to attend the theater, because Bates, the telegraph operator at the War Department, says that when Lincoln visited the Secretary of War about ten-thirty that morning, Stanton found that he was "set on going" to the theater in spite of the Secretary's warning that it might not be safe.[66]

And when Speaker Colfax, according to the Washington Evening Star, April 15, 1865, visited Lincoln as he was starting to the theater, the President stated to him that he was going, although Mrs. Lincoln had not been well, because he did not want to disappoint the people.[67]

While, of course, Merwin's story of Lincoln's announced purpose to lead a crusade against the liquor traffic is difficult to directly contradict, the marked improbability of his entire story in connection with it is so apparent that it is little wonder Robert Lincoln politely rejected it.

[64] Starr, 18. [65] Ibid. [66] Bates, 366.

[67] "She (Mrs. Lincoln) had tried to persuade her husband not to go, but he persisted in order, as he said, to escape the multitude which would otherwise press into the White House to shake hands with him." Starr, 19-20.



Ford's Theatre, showing Star Saloon, where Booth took his last drink before the assassination

In a letter dated April 30, 1917, from Robert T. Lincoln to Charles T. White, a portion of which has been quoted in a previous chapter, he said, with particular reference to the Merwin interview:

"Then, as to his dining with my father on the day of his death, I can only say this: I arrived from Appomattox on the morning of that day and breakfasted with my father; I do not recall anything about luncheon, but I dined with him and my mother in the evening of that day, and I simply know that neither Mr. Merwin nor any other guest was present at the dinner. Perhaps Mr. Merwin did take luncheon with him and called it dinner. That is entirely possible, but I know nothing of it, and personally, I have my doubts as to the truth of the statement. That was a very busy day at the White House.

"General Grant was in town and conferred with my father; there was a Cabinet meeting, and it is hard to make me believe that on that day he discussed with Mr. Merwin a plan for the extension and completion of the Panama Canal by means of the labor of the freedmen, and plans for his going to New York to secure the view of Horace Greeley and others on the subject. The sum of this is that while there may be no doubt of Mr. Merwin having done something in the cause of temperance, I can not help the feeling that in his account of things he has let his imagination run a little wild. . . .

"As an illustration of the growth of inventions, in a book of Dr. Hobson, who never saw my father, I find, at page 53, the following statement: 'Mr. Lincoln often "preached" what he called his "sermon to boys," as follows: "Don't drink, don't gamble, don't smoke, don't lie, don't cheat. Love your fellowmen, love God, love truth, love virtue, and be happy."'

"In the inquiry made of me, of which I wrote above, a later author improved this invention of Dr. Hobson's as follows:

" 'The Hon. Robert T. Lincoln has stated that his father never used liquor or tobacco in any form, and quotes the following sermon, as he calls it, which he preached to his boys: "Don't drink, don't smoke, don't swear, don't gamble, don't lie, don't cheat. Love

your fellowmen and love God. Love truth, love virtue and be happy.'"

"I never made this statement nor heard of it until I saw it as indicated.

Very truly yours,
ROBERT T. LINCOLN."[68]

Two hours after Colfax's interview with Lincoln at the White House, J. Wilkes Booth, acclaimed by Washington billboards as the "Youngest Tragedian in the World," paced restlessly up and down the sidewalk in front of Ford's Theater. The dapper, swaggering actor wore a dark frock coat and trousers, long, elegant riding boots of soft polished calfskin, and one of those new black round-topped hats that marked the man of fashion.

The weather was changing rapidly. Patches of clouds scudded across the sky. Now and then flashes of lightning flickered along the western horizon. In a little while, if it did not rain, the moon would be rising over the gnarled willows that fringed the sluggish Potomac.

Shortly after ten o'clock, Booth entered the Star Saloon adjoining the playhouse, and called for whisky. The barkeeper, Peter Taltavull, set out a bottle with a small tumbler, which his customer filled to the brim and drained at a gulp. Then wiping his black glossy mustache with a silk handkerchief, the "youngest tragedian in the world" walked through the lobby of the theater and turned furtively toward the long flight of carpeted steps that led to the balcony. Upstairs in the state box, gaily festooned with flags, Abraham Lincoln sat with his back to the door. . . .

[68] White, 159.

THE END

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